NF

**ISSUE #70: PEACH IN THE LIMELIGHT**

**MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG**

18 YEARS LATER: **SUPER PRINCESS PEACH**

AN INTERVIEW WITH **SAWAKI TAKEYASU**

**POKÉMON SCARLET &**

OF AREA ZERO, PART 2: **THE INDIGO DISK**

**ANOTHER CODE: RECOLLECTION**

**PRINCE OF PERSIA:** THE LOST CROWN

**XBOX ON SWITCH?**

**SUPER MONKEY BALL:** BANANA RUMBLE

**POKÉMON LEGENDS: Z-A**

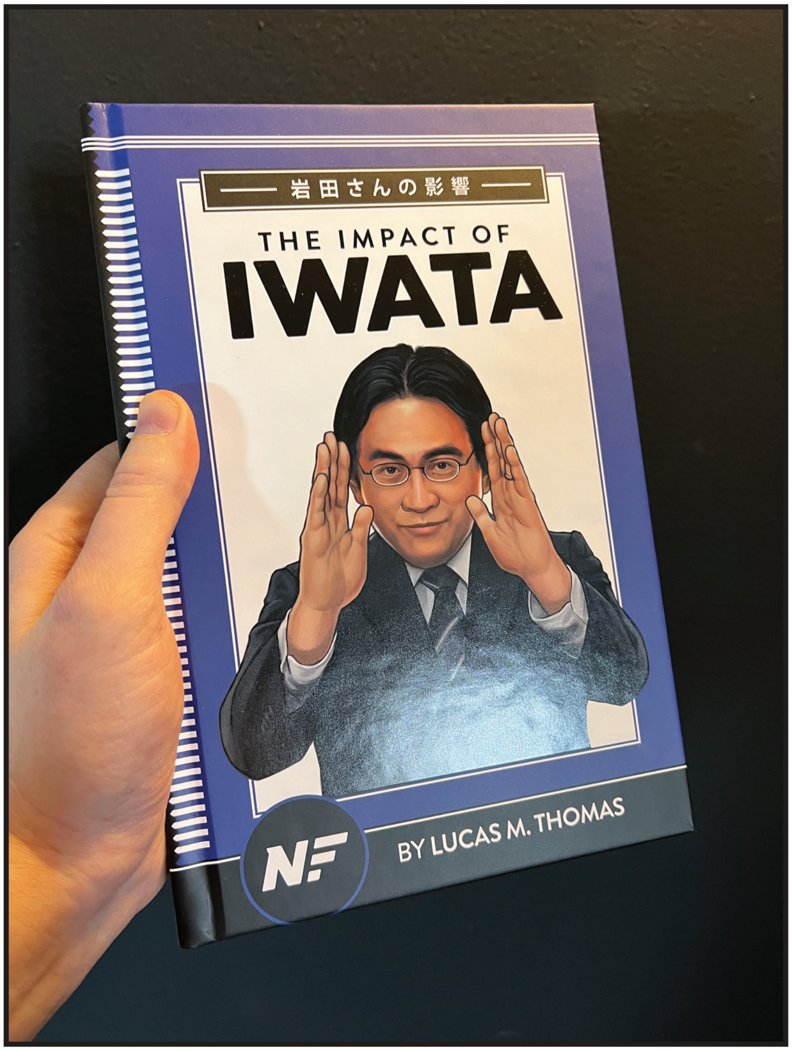
**DISNEY EPIC MICKEY:** REBRUSHED

**WAPEACH REVEALED!**

*MARCH/APRIL 2024*

# BOOKS NOW IN HAND!

**AN ALL-NEW ERA** is officially under way! With backer preorders now fulfilled following our successful Kickstarter for The Impact of Iwata, we've now fully entered into our new chapter where books are just a thing we do now. We have opened up a new Books section in the website shop at NintendoForceMagazine.com (a.k.a. NFMagazine.com), and you can go there right now to place an order and get your own physical or digital copy of the very first NF book!




If you missed out on pledging/pre-ordering a copy during last summer's Kickstarter campaign, buying the book is now as simple as buying back issues of the magazine has always been. I've also preserved the pricing and extra item offers from last year's pledge tiers, so anyone ordering now can still get the same deals – like the Collector's Edition bundle, which pairs an autographed copy of the book with an "obi" dust jacket, a set of 16 art print postcards, a bookmark and a wall poster. Two wall posters, even! And the digital version of the book! And the *audiobook* version!

. . . Well, work is actually still in progress on the audiobook, so stay tuned for a future announcement here that'll let you know when The Impact of Iwata is ready for your ears as well as your eyes. (It's coming along well! It's going to have a whole album of new OC ReMixes as bonus content!)

Additional digital formats like a Kindle-specific edition are also still in the works, and we'll be expanding the sale of the print version to other storefronts as well. There's a lot still happening with our NF Books expansion, even though we've cleared a few finish lines already!

Thank you as always, faithful NF Magazine readers! Without the foundational support of our magazine readership, we wouldn't be able to branch out and do more projects like this. You all are the best! **– LUCAS**

**NintendoForceMagazine.com/Category/Books**

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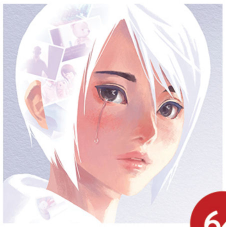
**MARCH/APRIL 2024**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## ON THE COVER

Curtains up! Pick up your playbill, find your seat and settle in for an on-stage spectacle in Princess Peach: Showtime!, the latest title to claim the coveted NF cover spot. Peach is in full twirl, spinning around her all-new magic ribbon while her stellar new ally Stella looks on in awe. In the background, the setting of their adventure: the Sparkle Theater! All seems truly well with these two. (But beware the back cover of this edition, as it's been overrun by the wicked witch Grape and her posse of poisonous produce, the Sour Bunch!)

# INBOX

## WISHING FOR SUCCESS FOR THE PRINCESS

I've always been a Toadstool supporter.

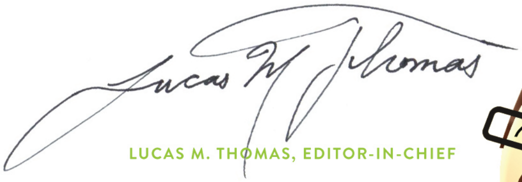
Every since my first time playing Super Mario Bros. 2, all the way back at the end of the '80s when I was only seven years old, I've been cheering her on. She won me over with her incredible hovering long jumps in that adventure, and I'd regularly choose her over the others on the character select screen time and time again. I dabbled with Luigi. I gave Toad a shot once or twice, just to see for myself how his speed differed from the others. But in the end I always returned to my first love – even now, decades later, I still pick the Princess every time I replay that classic game.

I know I'm not alone in that, and the community of players who appreciate the Princess in particular is a large one. But – and those other Toadstool supporters will back me up on this – it hasn't always been easy to keep the Princess as a preference.

She just wasn't a playable option any more after that one-time appearance on the select screen! Not for many more years afterward. She went back to being just the series' regular kidnapping victim over and over – just the reason why Mario'd get up out of bed in the morning. I missed the Hero Princess! I missed getting to beat up bad guys *as* her, instead of beating up bad guys just to get to her, then see her on-screen for less than a minute before the credits rolled.

Well, with all that in my background, you can bet I'd want to celebrate the upcoming release of Princess Peach: Showtime! in a major way! So this milestone 70th NF issue is dedicated to Princess Peach. We've got a big final preview of Showtime! that introduces 10 of her new costume changes. We've got an "18 Years Later" retrospective on Super Princess Peach from the DS, her last headlining role. We're even taking a page out of Taylor Swift's playbook for our central feature, which we're calling "Princess Peach: The Eras Tour." Walk back through her whole career up to this point, to better prepare you for the beginning of her next chapter!

Will Showtime! be a showstopper? Will the Princess find sales success? We certainly hope so, so we're playing our part!



LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #69: JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2024

We did a three-way split of our front cover of "Three Takes on Remakes," and we've got reviews for two of those titles ready to roll in this issue! Flip forward to our Reviews section for our evaluations of both Another Code: Recollection and Mario vs. Donkey Kong, Nintendo's latest first-party remakes. (Going on sale third of the three is the third-party game Contra: Operation Galuga, and we'll have its review next time.)

Our Player's Poll was all about Princess Peach! First, we asked you to estimate how many times you've saved her in different games over the years (and decades). Next, we wanted to know if you ever choose to play as Peach in titles where that's an option, like Super Mario Bros. Wonder. Lastly, we asked you to get creative and come up with your own idea for a new outfit for her to wear, and powers with it!

## LETTERS

I think I have saved Princess Peach at least over 100 times. My favorite Peach save was in Super Mario Galaxy – it was such a good game, and I'll never forget fighting the final boss to save her!

Playing as Peach? Depends on what kind of Mario game I'm playing. If it's something like Super Mario Bros. Wonder, I'll stick with my man Mario, since all the characters play the same (besides the Yoshis and Nabbit). But if I'm playing a game like Super Mario Bros. 2, I will play as Peach because it's always fun to have a floating character!

There are many different costumes I would love to see Peach wear in her new game, but my personal idea would be for Peach to turn into a witch! Of course not the wicked green kind of witch, but rather a Harry Potter type of witch. My ideas for her powers with his costume would be for her to use her magic wand to make things float in the air – maybe even if there are two enemies close by, they'd collide with each other. And she could make magic potions like Stun, Invisibility, Gain Health and, my personal favorite, Transformation! **– EMORY SWANNER**

A ballpark estimate on saving the Princess, eh? Well, starting on the SNES and working our way up through every Mario title released since then . . . probably near 100. (If not a bit over.)

I can't count how many times I've played through Super Mario World and Super Mario 64. With multiple playthroughs of Galaxy 1 & 2 to unlock Luigi, only to then beat them both once more. **– RIVER SHEPHERD**

How many times have I liberated Peach? Certainly not in the thousands – but maybe a gross and a half. I've yet to tire of it.

And I'm happy to play as her. She can be just as, if not more, fun to play as than Mario. (Though it does make me wonder why she gets captured so easily and so often.)

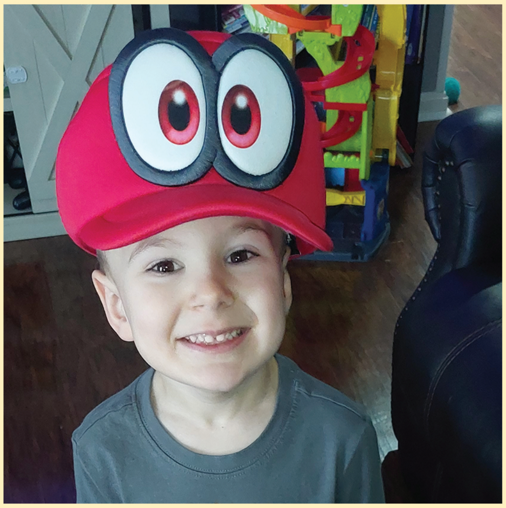
Well, since I love animals, let's let her be involved with them somehow. She can be a veterinarian, a zookeeper or a crazy cat lady. **– ALEX WINTER**

**Crazy Cat Lady Peach, trying to herd Cat Mario and Cat Luigi and Cat Toad and Meowser as they all run around . . . it's a beautiful thought.**

I've finished very few Mario games, so it's not like I got to the point where I could save *anyone* in the end. If I had to guess, I've officially rescued Peach only four to five times, but that's just counting the first time I reached the end of each game, not counting replays.

I pick to play as Princess Peach 99% of the time when I can. At first it was because of her outfit. Then it was because of her two-second floating ability. Now it's all that, plus I identify with her – I'm a trans girl who loves princesscore but not damsels in distress, so she's my go-to.

I think Nintendo is missing a huge opportunity with this one: Peach oughta get a belly dancer's costume. I love belly dancing and would love to see her in a fabulous outfit like that, with the power to seduce characters and gain them as allies who do all her dirty work out of infatuation. **– TEENKITSUNE**



## LET'S HEAR FROM THE HIRSCHBUHLS!

My 4-year-old son Will and I greatly look forward to receiving your magazine in the mail every other month! As a lifelong reader of Nintendo Power, I am so glad that my son has the ability to get that same joy of getting all of his Nintendo news in a physical magazine the way his Dad did. Will's favorite character (in video games, or otherwise) FAR AND AWAY is Princess Peach, so I asked him the Player's Poll questions for this issue and wrote his responses. He would absolutely LOVE to see his name in your magazine:
1) I have rescued Princess Peach only once, in Super Mario Odyssey.
2) I always choose Princess Peach when she is a playable character, because she can float and she wears my favorite color, pink! Cat Peach is my favorite!
3) I would like to see Peach dress up like a Train Conductor (for mine cart-style levels) or a mouse! A piece of cheese could come out of the Question Blocks and when she transforms into a mouse, she could become small and go into holes and get to places she couldn't normally fit into! I also want her to turn into a Goomba! **– ROB & WILL HIRSCHBUHL**

Hi Mr. NF!

I haven't actually rescued Peach that many times. I've definitely played as Peach more times than I've rescued her!

Peach is my first pick when she's available, just because she's my favorite Mario character. But if I'm going just off of gameplay I wouldn't choose her, because I usually like playing as heavyweight characters like Bowser.

My outfit for Peach is a dancer. She would look great as a ballet dancer, but would also look great with something different, like hip-hop. **– KYLA**

Over the years (well, since like 2013), I've only rescued Princess Peach maybe four times. When I started getting good at video games, I mostly started playing games aimed at a slightly older audience, such as Breath of the Wild or Minecraft, and I didn't bother to go back and play Mario. I should do that soon!

It honestly depends on which game I'm playing. If I choose to play as the Princess, it's usually in a game like one of the 3D games or Wonder. While playing Super Smash Bros. or Mario Kart, Peach is a good choice, but I have other favorites.

Wow, this one is hard! If I could choose anything, I would probably add an outfit/power from another Nintendo franchise, like a Samus suit or Link's iconic green outfit. It would be a lot of fun, and I think that these outfits could easily be added in as an amiibo reward! **– LILLY**

**Showtime! amiibo support could be great!**

I think I saved Peach a couple dozen times. And I've also beaten quite a few games where you don't save Peach.

I always pick Toad. More specifically, Yellow Toad. I don't pick Peach unless I'm in need of her hovering ability, which she sometimes doesn't even have. I like having the speed of Toad, plus that yellow is stylish! **– YOUR 10-YEAR-OLD FAN, JUDAH**

I can actually count on one hand the amount of times I've saved Peach, as I've only completed games where such a feat is required. In order they are: Super Paper Mario, Super Mario Galaxy 2, Super Mario Galaxy, New Super Mario Bros. 2 and Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga + Bowser's Minions. I've played all the M+L games, but I don't exactly consider Peach in need of rescue in those games. At worst in Paper Jam she's mildly inconvenienced, but I'm just splitting hairs to keep my original joke intact. The point is I'm both one of the few people subscribed to this magazine who doesn't actually care for most Mario games, but also part of the large group of subscribers who knows Daisy is better.

When she is playable I do often play as the female characters more as a rule, not just Peach, because the girls get more clothing options. Though, if we are talking playable Peach, I'm gonna go with Daisy if I can. That's just an objective upgrade.

For lack of ever getting a Battalion Wars 1+2 HD (glory to Xylvania), the outfit I would add to Princess Peach: Showtime! would be to have her put on her best Brigadier Betty cosplay and start blasting! Hey, Kirby's cute, pink, and packin' heat now. Why not give Peach a gun? **– ZEEBOR**

I think I've saved Peach roughly 25 times. The majority of those come from the RPGs!

I often pick Peach when she's available, 'cause I like her floaty playstyle! But Daisy is my preferred princess, so in games like Double Dash!! where they work exactly the same, I pick Daisy.

Peach should dress up as a superhero because that's cool! **– SILAS**

**You'll get your wish, Silas! (Check out Page 41!)**

When I hear the word "showtime," the first thing I think of is a circus. So, I think it would be interesting to see Peach as a ringmaster. I'm not quite sure what powers that would give her, but I'll leave that to Nintendo to figure out. **– DANIEL INVERSO**

## CARTER'S CORNER

Hello again!

The quiz answer is . . . both? Super Mario Odyssey can be finished quickly, but you could still have less than 10% completion by then. Super Mario Bros. Wonder has points of interest in plain sight. There was no afterstory, but the Special World was great! So I like them equally. It was a trick question!

You might wonder which of the five games I mentioned last time that I'm doing first. After getting a complete guide to Tears of the Kingdom as a Christmas present, it wasn't that hard to decide! I haven't made any progress in the main story yet here in 2024, but I have done lots of major side stuff, such as beating all the Depths Coliseums (using Ancient Blades for some Lynels), boosting my max defense by 24, beating six boss rematches, beating a Silver Lynel (without an Ancient Blade!) and much, much more. All within 12 hours or so!

Quiz Time! How many Peaches have I rescued? See you next time!

## THEY'RE THE MILLERS

Invitation accepted. Imagine my surprise when I opened a recent issue to find the pic our family took a lifetime ago published three years later! So happy that Nintendo Force is still going strong, powering through a global pandemic, contentious elections and worldwide upheaval. We Millers have also faced our own ups and downs, but continue to power forward, partially fueled by the child-like joy contained within the pages of each and every NF issue.

You invited us to recreate our pic originally intended for your 50th issue. We figured what better time than for your 70th issue! Happy to see it published, whether it's now or in another three years! May the Force continue to be strong for many more lifetimes to come! Fanfully Yours, **THE MILLER FAM**

**No three-year delay this time! Thanks for your ongoing support, Miller family!**

# THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Will Hirschbuhl**, the winner of our most recent Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to three questions about life under the sea!

### QUESTION #1

Water levels in video games have been infamous at least since TMNT's Dam stage on the NES, decades ago. Do you fear in-game swimming, or not?

### QUESTION #2

Another Crab's Treasure is launching on Switch soon. Tell us: What is the best crab in gaming? Could be a friend, or a GIANT ENEMY!

### QUESTION #3

The Endless Ocean series is getting an all-new sequel in May! Have you played either of its first two games? Do you plan to dive into the new one?

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #71" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win their choice of Switch game, as long as it has water in it.

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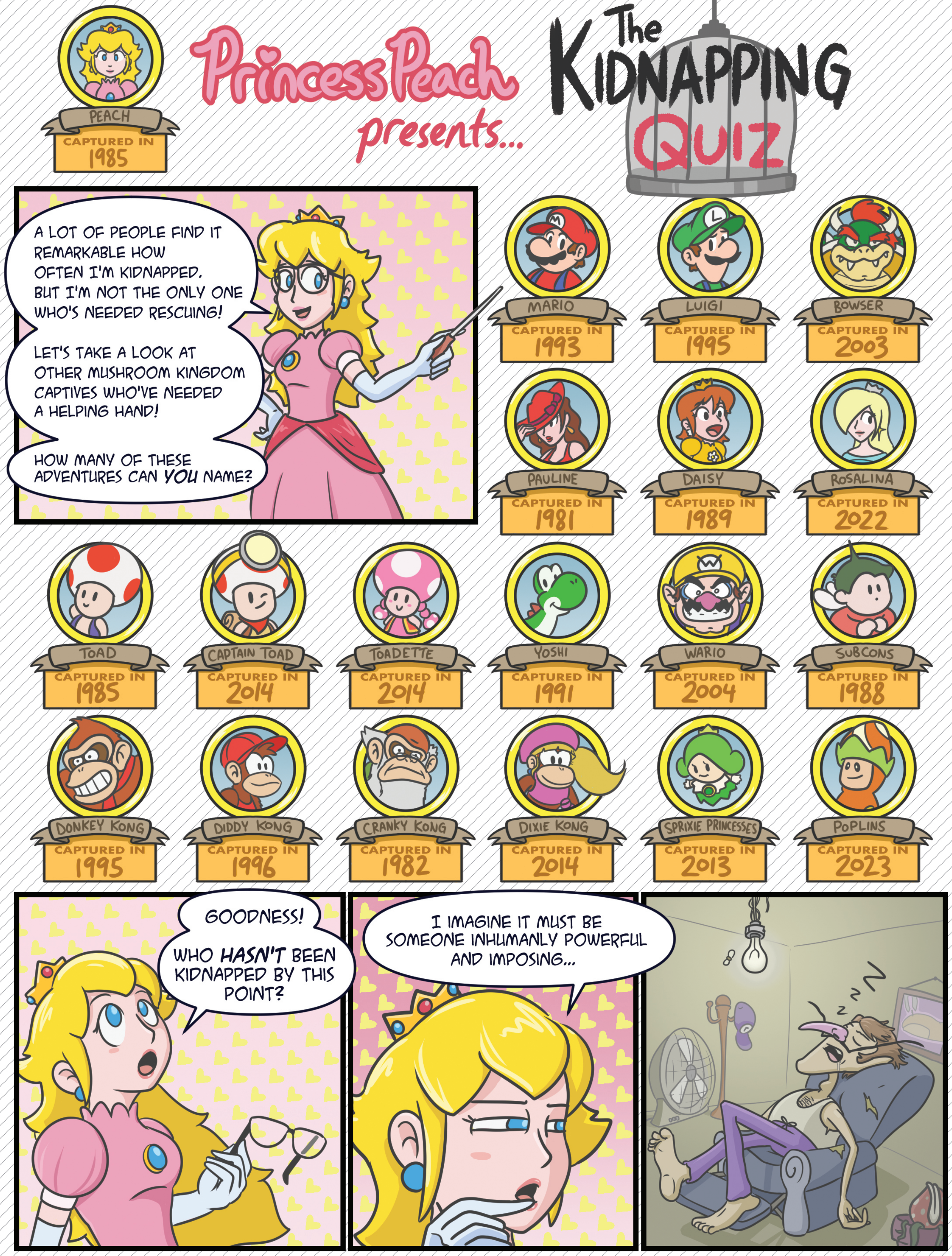



BY MATTHEW TARANTO

ANSWERS AT THE END OF THE ISSUE! TRY TO NAME AS MANY AS YOU CAN BEFORE YOU CHECK, THOUGH!

# NEWS

# Xbox Games Make the Switch

## Half a decade later, the unprecedented cross-platform partnership is finally materializing.

**IN SEPTEMBER OF** last year, a major leak of Microsoft's internal documents revealed several plans for the future of Xbox. This led to the Xbox team needing to fast-track a bunch of announcements they weren't ready to make, and on February 15, an Xbox Podcast clarified some of those plans. Head of Xbox Phil Spencer revealed that four Xbox exclusives would be coming to other consoles: The Switch, PS4 and PS5 are all getting Pentiment and Grounded, while Hi-Fi Rush and Sea of Thieves will only go to PS5. (For now, at least.)

Grounded has players getting shrunken down (à la Honey I Shrunk the Kids) for a backyard adventure battling bugs and finding unique ways to traverse the familiar-yet-brand-new landscape. Originally released on Xbox platforms in September 2022, this survival/action/adventure game has players exploring either solo or online with up to three friends. Choose between Max, Pete, Hoops or Willow, then venture out to find food, water and items to increase your armor, craft weapons and survive long enough to grow big again.

Pentiment is a different animal altogether, and is largely described as "not for everyone." The game was released on Microsoft's hardware back in November 2022 as a narrative adventure role-playing game. Players assume the role of Andreas Maler, an artist's apprentice from Germany. Maler travels to Tassing, a fictional alpine town in Bavaria, and becomes an impromptu gumshoe investigating several murders and crimes in the town in a 25-year timespan. The game has several decisions to make that all have pros and cons, and players can even fill in Maler's backstory with decision trees if they wish.

Both titles are certainly a welcome surprise. There has been a lot of talk since Banjo and Kazooie appeared in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate about how Xbox has been trying to play nicer with Nintendo. If this is a positive experience for everyone, hopefully it will lead to more games and more opportunities. It's a win-win, as it fizzles the rivalries a bit and is great for consumers.

Which Xbox games do you hope will jump to Nintendo next? **— BRETT**

# Pokémon, Plagiarized!?

## This new Pokémon competitor is wildly popular. But are its monsters a little too close to Pikachu's pals?

**PAL, THE WORLD'S** a funny place, especially when it comes to Pokémon. But Palworld is a whole other animal!

For starters, it doesn't play much like Pokémon. Under the skin, it's more like Ark: Survival Ascended, a survival/crafting game from 2023 that's more about punching trees and shooting at dinosaurs than catchin' 'em all. Palworld is a lot like that, except easier to get into. Oh, and there are also fake Pokémon everywhere called "Pals" that you can punch in the face, arm with machine guns and even put in sweatshops.

It's got a real "late '00s online edgy humor" feel to it, and as the creator of one of the most inappropriate, disliked Pokémon parody cartoons of the early 2010s, (which I won't name in this family-friendly, feel-good magazine), I feel qualified to say that without pointing fingers.

But does Palworld count as a parody, legally speaking? Developer Pocketpair may have to make a case that it is sooner rather than later, and I don't think it stands much of a chance. According to Webster's Dictionary, a parody is "a literary or musical work in which the style of an author is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule." And from the looks of some unverified investigations from fans online, Palworld may not just be imitating Pokémon – it may have outright stolen from it!

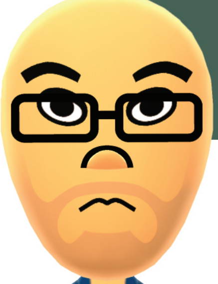
Specifically, some of the polygon mesh graphics that make up the Pals' bodies are nearly identical to character meshes from Pokémon Sword & Shield. In response to this revelation, The Pokémon Company released a statement letting fans know that they " . . . have not granted any permission for the use of Pokémon intellectual property or assets in that game. We intend to investigate and take appropriate measures to address any act that infringes on intellectual property rights related to the Pokémon." Other Pokémon clones like Cassette Beasts, Monster Sanctuary or Temtem never received that kind of public threat of potential litigation. Pocketpair really pokéd the bear(tic) on this one!

But even negative publicity can be good publicity, and the more fans of Pokémon called out Palworld for its perceived or actual transgressions, the better it sold. (The fact that the game is currently an Xbox and Windows exclusive may have something to do with that.) Fans of Microsoft's consoles have been pretty concerned about their future lately, so it stands to reason that they will take any construable "win" in the console wars they can get. So, despite the lack of originality, and the potentially criminal development practices behind it, they still cheered when it was announced that Palworld achieved 19,000,000 players worldwide by the end of its launch month in January.

They may have also been happy because the game is . . . actually OK! It's not amazing, but it can be pretty compelling, albeit in a soulless sort of way. And compared to the low-budget look of Pokémon Scarlet & Violet, Palworld definitely looks more "expensive," likely thanks to running on more powerful hardware.

The best-case scenario for everyone is that this concept of competition from Palworld leads The Pokémon Company to make even better games in the future. Then everyone wins! **– JONATHAN**

> "The people for and against Palworld have gotten pretty hostile toward each other online. Maybe they should take all that hostility toward real, harmless people and aim it toward battling some fictional Pokémon (and/or "Pals")."
> – JONATHAN



# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

## Pretty in Pink

### New Joy-Cons promote Princess Peach!

**DEALING WITH JOY-CONS** is generally not my favorite part of the Switch experience, but I do respect their collectability. To coincide with the release of Princess Peach: Showtime! on March 22, a special pair of pastel pink Joy-Cons will be released. The presentation here with the tulips is just such good marketing, and Easter will follow the release just a week later!

You may be thinking that a pink Joy-Con set has already been released, and you'd be right. There was a set of pastel Joy-Cons in yellow and pink (and also purple and green) that came out last June. A rightside Joy-Con in pink is the new addition here. Sure, it's Peach's shade of pink, but this seems like a real lackadaisical effort to release alongside a game. Peach should appear on at least one controller! Or maybe even her crown emblem? $79.99 also seems high so late in the Switch life cycle, but these could very well be the last new color set released for the Switch, as the new console is looming. Judging from Internet comments, though, people are excited and these should be well-received. Many said that the buttons should either also be pink or white versus the traditional black variety, but to no avail.

These limited-edition controllers will only be available at "select retailers" and Nintendo's online store, so those wanting to roll the dice to avoid stick drift on another set of Joy-Cons should keep their eyes peeled for pre-orders.

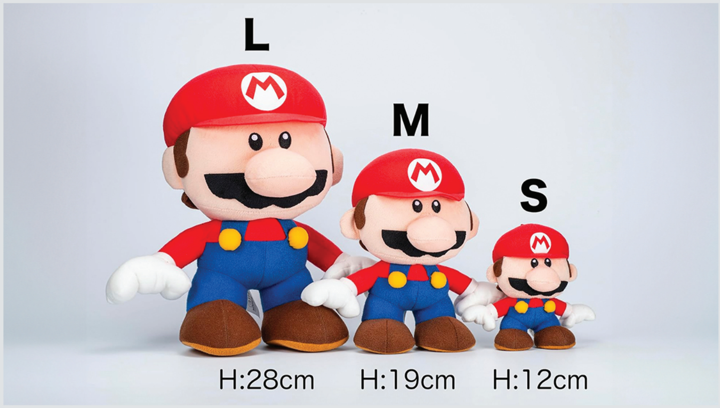
## Pepsi Princess

### Alear looks alluring in figure form!

**ILLUSTRATOR MIKA PIKAZO** created a special drawing of Alear after the dragon youth had awakened from her slumber: The Divine Dragon successor is poised for battle, and her pose and facial expression depict her determination. This new figure is based off of that illustration, and she will come with her sword! Her stark blue and red colors do suggest a mascot for soft drink or toothpaste brands, but make no mistake! She is a brutal warrior and shouldn't be trifled with . . . or used for commercial purposes.

Speaking of commerce, Good Smile is peddling this highly detailed figure for $216.99. That's hefty for a figure that isn't posable in any way, but Good Smile is the high-end company for anime-style figures, and has a history of releasing immaculate Fire Emblem figures like Corrin, Byleth, Roy and Marth.

This figure is not set to be released until 2025, but we wanted to cover it now because pre-orders are due to close in May. No word yet on whether the male version of Alear will also get the same treatment, but releasing both together would've been doubly expensive! This collection is a wallet *and* patience killer!




## How Mini is Your Mario?

### Choose from three different stuffed sizes!

**THESE MINI-MARIO PLUSHES** are technically a re-release of some plushes that Epoch created and Taito distributed as UFO Catcher prizes in Japan for the release of Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2, 17 years ago! (The first game also got plushes, but they were different and smaller.) It's odd they always seem to go to plushes, as the in-game toys are plastic wind-ups! Kurbick released a figure way back when, but it didn't wind, and a wholly obscure raffle prize figure encased in a bubble exists, but still doesn't have the mechanisms like the ones in the game! Oh well, they're still cute as ever! This time the plushes are retail, and there are 12cm ($15), 19cm ($18) and 28cm ($30) varieties. Look to import shops like Amazon Japan or AmiAmi to snag the size of your choice!

## Bellsprout Used Flash!

### Light up the dimmest den with this Pokémon friend.

**NETFLIX'S EXCLUSIVE NEW** Pokémon show is called Pokémon Concierge, and The Pokémon Center is now unveiling exclusive goods to mirror the exclusive's exclusivity! The chief eyecatcher in the collection is the Bellsprout lamp. The lamp can be seen in the Pokémon Resort in the show, and it sells for 7,700 yen, which is around $50. There's also a Horsea watering can for 4,400 yen, or about $30. A Psyduck mask and some other home goods like pens and a mug accompany the slew of bags, shirts, notebooks and cushions that are adorned with patterns featuring various characters and backgrounds from the show. It's always cool to be able to own props that come right from the shows you enjoy, and I hope The Pokémon Center continues bringing us items from Concierge!

## The Swing's the Thing

### You'll get hooked on these Kirby figures!

**VOLUME 2 OF** the Kirby Swing figure sets from Re-ment is here! Between Re-ment, Takara, Ensky and Nintendo themselves, we get dozens of new items each month for Kirby!

Volume 1 featured Kirby & Waddle Dee, Meta Knight, Beam Kirby & Waddle Doo, Sword Kirby and Waddle Dee with a Parasol. The new Volume 2 has Sleeping Kirby, Kirby & Magolor, Waddle Dees picking apples, Kirby & Elfilin, Ice Kirby & Chilly and Round Kirby from Kirby's Dream Buffet. Each retails for around $10.

The scenes are wild and have some great art! Though I had a problem with the parasol on Volume 1's Waddle Dee not staying in, and in general the hooks are fragile. So be cautious with them!

BY BRETT MARTIN

# Brie Praises the Princess

## Nintendo hired Captain Marvel herself to endorse Peach's new game.

**WELP, THAT'S IT:** Live-action Metroid movie confirmed!

No, no, no. I won't hear any of your naysaying on the subject. I'm jumping to that conclusion with complete confidence, and I won't have anyone try to convince me otherwise!

Listen, here are the facts.

**Fact #1:** Brie Larson wore a Zero Suit Samus costume for Halloween back in 2018. That got a lot of people talking about how they'd like to see her actually play Samus in a movie. She really liked that idea.

**Fact #2:** Brie launched a YouTube channel in 2020, and her first-ever video featured her showing off her Animal Crossing: New Horizons island. She put her Nintendo fandom front and center for all to see!

**Fact #3:** She reiterated her desire to play Samus later that same year, saying, "I definitely want to make that movie, I definitely want to participate in that. So, Nintendo, once again, I would love to do it!"

**Fact #4:** We now know Nintendo is actually interested in making live-action films with their franchises. The Legend of Zelda has been confirmed.

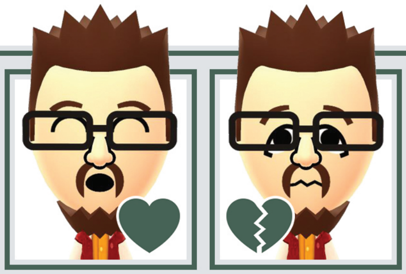
**Fact #5:** Nintendo hired her! She was brought in as a celebrity spokesperson for Princess Peach: Showtime!

I'm afraid it's undeniable, folks. *Don't you see!?* The evidence is all *right there!*

. . . OK, OK. No Metroid movie news is actually confirmed, I'll admit. But speculation on that subject is certainly going to be fanned into flame once more now that we know for sure she's been in contact with Nintendo. At the very least, *at absolute minimum*, the decision makers at the Big N have sat in a board room and discussed the possibility. And on the other side of the coin? Development of live-action Metroid with Brie as Samus could be several years along by now!

Nintendo might keep all of their other live-action movie plans secret until they see whether or not the Zelda film bombs at the box office. A lot's riding on that one! For Brie, I hope she gets her wish. But, if she doesn't, at least she got to have some fun promoting Princess Peach. **— LUCAS**

**Great!**
Brie Larson successfully infiltrated Nintendo!



**Oh.**
. . . We still don't know if she'll get to be Samus.

# FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

**TWO ISSUES AGO** we took our first look at this latest effort from Vanillaware, the development studio best known for the absolutely gorgeous hand-drawn art style used by all of their releases. Now that visual splendor will be ushering in the month of March, as Unicorn Overlord is due to debut on March 8! It's a deep, involved strategy RPG, but don't let yourself be intimidated by that – instead, just try it with its free eShop demo!

**SPEAKING OF FREE** eShop demos, there's also one of those newly available for this second major release in the month of March. Contra: Operation Galuga officially goes on sale on March 12, but you can try it out for yourself first by simply surfing to its purchase page in the eShop. Kris did just that, and he'll share his impressions on Page 15!

**OUR COVER GAME** for this NF edition is also on its way in March, 10 days after Contra's return. Circle March 22 on your calendar now, because you've got tickets to a spectacular show at the glitzy, gleaming Sparkle Theater! More than one show, actually – there's a detective mystery, a swordfighting epic . . . and a baking competition? Plenty more beyond those, too. Let's start to sort it all out in our new preview starting on Page 38.

**NOBODY TOLD THQ** that the first day of Spring this year is March 19, because they've scheduled their wintry, blustery, blizzardy Snow Day to blow into town one week later, on March 26! Hopefully it'll be nice and sunny outside when we first get to dive into this chilly action romp. Take a look by flipping ahead to Page 45!

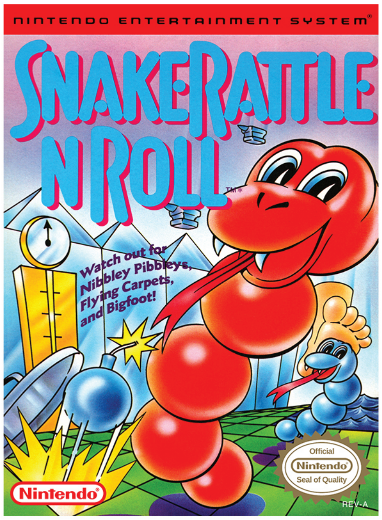
**A THIRD FREE** eShop demo to mention in the same Forecast? Sure, why not! Just like Unicorn Overlord and Contra: Operation Galuga, Pepper Grinder is letting you try before you buy. Its full version is due to debut on March 28, and if Matthew T.'s demo experience is anything to go by, that's a date that should see a lot of sales for Devolver Digital! Read his impressions of the drill-driving action on Page 15.

**FINALLY, WHILE THE** month of April is looking a whole lot lighter than March in quantity of notable new releases, it has one in particular we want to shed more light on! El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron is getting a remastered HD re-release on April 28, and to discuss it further we've got the game's director in our Interview section. Page 59!

> "Winter fades away once more, and the Nintendo Switch is just about to turn seven years old on March 3. We're entering its *eighth* year! That's incredible! It's very, very likely that this will be the Switch's last trip around the sun before it has to concede its spotlight to a successor, but I'm impressed at how strong of a lineup of new software we're still seeing at this point, even knowing that "Switch 2" must be just over the horizon. – **LUCAS**"

**TAGGING ON TO** that "Xbox games coming to Switch" article that opened this section, more Rare games have just been added to Nintendo Switch Online! (Rare used to be a big second-party developer for Nintendo, but Microsoft bought them to bring them into the Xbox fold. So any Rare classics that pop back up on Big N hardware now are due to Microsoft's benevolence!)

The new arrivals included Killer Instinct and Battletoads in Battlemaniacs from the SNES, R.C. Pro-Am and Snake Rattle 'n Roll from the NES, and Blast Corps from the N64. All are worth a look, but I recommend Blast Corps in particular! See our review of it on Page 23! (Snake Rattle 'n Roll was also a childhood fave.)



# The True Value of Nintendo Switch Online

## Push past the greatest hits, dive deeper into the NSO retro selection and discover something odd and obscure!

**FOR ALL THE** success the Switch has seen since its launch in 2017, there's one aspect that most users simply fail to talk about: Nintendo Switch Online. Despite being used by tens of millions of subscribers, it's just not discussed frequently enough!

The service has had its moments, such as its additions of Nintendo 64, Genesis and Game Boy titles, but interest gradually fades until the next beloved game hits – with the most recent example being the Golden Sun duology from the Game Boy Advance. However, there are also times when a new game is added and no one seems to care, because it's not one of the all-time greats.

And I'm the same way! Or should I say, I used to be the same way. Last year, I decided to delve more deeply into the games available on NSO and found myself surprised at how much I was enjoying its eclectic collection. Mainly because I was actually able to play all these games rather than attempting to decide what to buy and try. As much as people wish the Virtual Console was still around so that they could actually own these old games, most stuck with the known greats and rarely tried other titles. Oddities fell by the wayside for only the most adventurous. I was absolutely the same way. I may have tried a few here and there back during the days of the Wii and Wii U, but I rarely ventured outside my comfort zone.

I don't have to worry about that with the NSO. If the inclination hits, I can play Vice: Project Doom on the NES just as easily as Super Mario Bros. 3, while still paying the same monthly price. I've heard of S.C.A.T.: Special Cybernetic Attack Team for years, but I always stayed away because of its incredibly unfortunate name. Yet after actually playing it, I found myself liking it way more than I ever would have imagined! It felt like a hidden gem for the NES. And that's when I started to fall in love with the service.

But what made me realize its true value were the rare and obscure games that have been made available. The Virtual Console had its fair share of oddities in its re-releases, but the NSO feels so much more eclectic! Not only is it the first time that Japanese classics like Joy Mech Fight, Devil World and Panel de Pon have been released in the West, but it serves as the first re-release for certain games as well. Journey to Silius, Castlevania Legends, GoldenEye and many more are well worth trying on the service.

And then there are the games that are given a second life. Using the Switch's own motion controls for Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble makes it the best way to play the game! The same can be said of Kirby and the Amazing Mirror, as the built-in online for every multiplayer game on the NSO makes it way easier to play that game the way it was meant to be played.

The question is, how many NSO subscribers are actually taking advantage of the full selection? That's the trap of old games: Most just want to play the classics. The ones held up as the best or most well-remembered of those old systems. But those have been released again and again and again, whether in Sega's endless collections or as the standard bearers of Nintendo's old Virtual Console offerings. Taking a chance on something you may not have heard of is well worth it, even if it's only for a few minutes (because there *are* some stinkers on the service).

However, you don't have to spend time with them! You don't have to rely on other people's opinions. You can see what clicks with you and move on, since the entire library's available with the same subscription (barring the Nintendo 64, GBA and Genesis games that are part of the pricier Expansion Pass). In that way, I think the NSO is far superior to the Virtual Console.

That being said, actually owning the games would be nice. Really, the best of both worlds would allow subscribers to purchase the games they want to have forever if they ever decide to cancel NSO. That would preserve the ability to sample the selection and satisfy the people who would prefer to simply own the games they want. Whether that eventually happens is up in the air, though I personally doubt it. Really the bigger issue of Nintendo's services is the absolutely glacial pace at which the company releases new games. The total amount has grown since the launch in 2018, with over 200 games now. But there should be far more, especially with so many systems represented!

More than anything else, I know there are a lot of brand-new games that get released each month. 2023 alone was massive in terms of releases, so there's not exactly a drought of games to play on Switch. But if you have NSO, take a little time each week to just try something old – something you've never played before that looks interesting or weird or even dumb. You might be surprised by just how much you like it, and, by extension, NSO itself. It's a lesser-known delight of the system! **– DERRICK**

*SPIN THE WHEEL!*

### PICK A RANDOM GAME

Our thanks to Derrick Bitner from Good Vibes Gaming for contributing this article! Be sure to check out Derrick's NSO Game Club on the GVG YouTube channel, a series in which he invites a pair of guests to let fate decide which NSO game they'll all play together. They spin the wheel, choose a game at random, all play it for a week and then reconvene to discuss their experience! There are 20 episodes so far. Take a look!

# Spread Gun Sampler

## Contra: Operation Galuga has a free eShop demo!

**FOLLOWING 2019'S WRETCHED** Contra: Rogue Corps, many fans wondered if we'd ever get to see a good Contra game again. So when Operation Galuga was announced a few months ago as a brand-new 2D entry with veteran developers WayForward back at the helm, it seemed like Konami was on track to set things right . . . but unfortunately, the debut trailer didn't leave a very good first impression. Thankfully, this demo goes a long way to provide some much-needed hope for the future of shirtless men running through the jungle while blasting aliens.

Bad news first: This demo is janky as heck. The framerate is wildly erratic, with some particularly nasty stutters while changing areas. There are also a few instances where background geometry will simply disappear! But while those are indeed major issues, the rest of the game is awesome enough to make up for it.

Picking up where they left off with the exquisite Contra 4 for Nintendo DS, Operation Galuga is classic Contra through and through, but with a few modern twists. While playing with the D-Pad yields traditional eight-way shooting, using the analog stick lets you take advantage of all 360 degrees for precision aiming. Each character comes equipped with a special dash move as well, and you can choose from multiple difficulty settings, in addition to whether you'd like to give yourself a life bar or go full old-school and enable one-hit kills.

The demo takes you through the first stage of the game, which can be played in both Story and Arcade modes. Story incorporates a delightfully cheesy action plot with some great voice acting and chatter between characters during gameplay, while Arcade cuts out all the talky bits, but lets you choose between five characters, including newcomer Ariana who sports a cool sliding kick move, and Probotector (a nod to Contra's censored European NES release) who can use the grappling hook from Contra 4.

The action setpieces are great, weapon stacking is back, character designs are fantastic and the music is positively incredible. If this demo's any indication, this game's gonna be a blast! **— KRIS**

**SWITCH** PUBLISHER: KONAMI DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RELEASE: MARCH 12, 2024 RATING: T

# Drill into this Demo Too!

## Take Devolver Digital's Pepper Grinder for a spin for free.

**INTREPID SEAFARER PEPPER** has an ax to grind. After being shipwrecked, her treasure gets swiped by a band of troublemakers! Luckily, she happens upon a high-powered drill that allows her to quickly burrow through all sorts of terrain in a quest to recover her stolen goods. Thus begins Pepper Grinder!

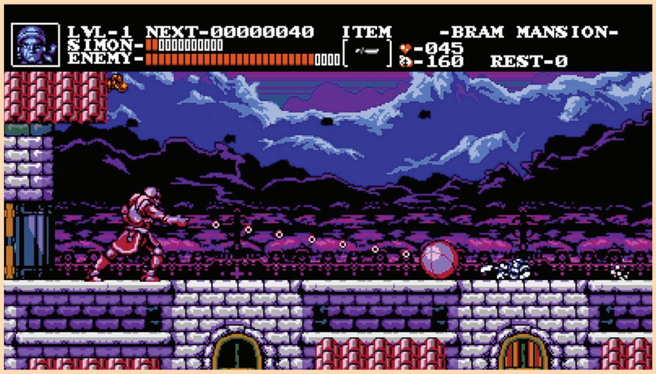
While "drill-wielding adventurer" might call to mind Dig Dug, Mr. Driller or Jill from Drill Dozer, the gameplay here is faster-paced with an emphasis on momentum. As the game's official description touts, Pepper's machine blasts through soft dirt "like a dolphin swims through water," with all the speed and finesse that that implies. As you traverse across the island-themed sidescrolling stages, you'll weave through trails of gems, dive between sand deposits, solve puzzles and maybe even uncover a secret or two beneath some hairline cracks in the walls! But watch out for prickly thorns, explosive mines and grumpy goons looking to give Pepper a hard time.

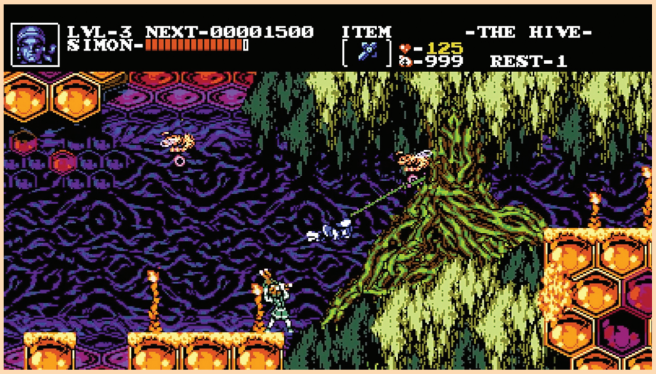
If you're feeling particularly bold, you can revisit stages to shoot for high scores in the Time Trial mode. Doing well can net you goodies such as stickers of the game's characters for your sticker book. As someone who obsessively shot for quick times in Donkey Kong Country Returns and Tropical Freeze, I had a blast shaving seconds off my records in the Pepper Grinder demo.

What makes it all work is how smooth it is to play: The controls are simple and intuitive, but with enough nuance to entice experts into figuring out the best paths through each tricky sequence. Completionists will also want to check out the in-game shop to purchase things with their gems, such as life extensions and more of those stickers.

The demo features three stages that should give you a solid impression of what to expect, but there're sure to be dozens more based on what the in-game percentage meter implies. I'd never heard of this game until it was featured in the recent Nintendo Direct: Partner Showcase, but now I'm excited for its full launch on March 28! If quick and precise action-platforming sounds fun to you, try out Pepper Grinder today on the eShop. You know the drill! **— MATTHEW T.**

**SWITCH** PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL DEVELOPER: AHR ECH
RELEASE: MARCH 28, 2024 RATING: E10+




# Don't Call it Castlevania

## Programancer is nearing the finish line with development of The Transylvania Adventure of Simon Quest.

**IT STARTED WITH** a simple question: "What if Simon's Quest was better?" Castlevania II, Simon Belmont's much-maligned second outing on the NES, has always had its fans, but there's definitely room for improvement. And that's where this new, legally distinct tribute/parody "The Transylvania Adventure of Simon Quest" comes in!

The two have a lot in common, to the point where there were once talks with Konami about potentially making this an official Castlevania title. The day/night cycle structure, option for exploration, village NPCs to meet and/or greet and the quest to bring the vile Dracula back to life (so you can kill him again) are all basically the same. But there's a lot that makes Simon Quest better, including high-flying barrel cannons, flashbacks to childhood trauma, competitive crab racing, intoxicating beverages, casual dog petting, underground vampire cults, fly fishing and more than a few fists of of fury in the never-ending battle against hordes of crunchable skeletons. (If you want to know more about how the game first came to be, check out our feature on it back in NF #42!)

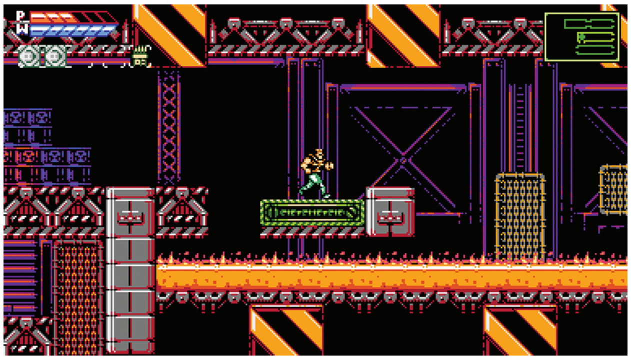
Simon Q. and his wall turkeys have come a long way since those humble beginnings as a Game Maker title in 2019. Most of the art has been redrawn and plenty of new pixels have been added, like an alien-esque Bee Queen, a take on Phanto from Super Mario Bros. 2, a take*off* on Dr. Brundle from David Cronenberg's The Fly and a mouthy plant that will feel dangerously familiar to fans of Super Metroid. And thanks to a pit stop in Prison City, the game is now running in a whole new engine! That's the latest title from Programancer, the creator of Simon Quest, which is out now on Switch (see our review on the very next page!). Not only is it an amazing retro action title in its own right, but it was also the testing ground for this new build of Simon's . . . journey. So, in a way, it was prison that finally freed Simon from PC platforms, so his quest for reincarnation on consoles could finally be fulfilled, tentatively set for launch in 2025.

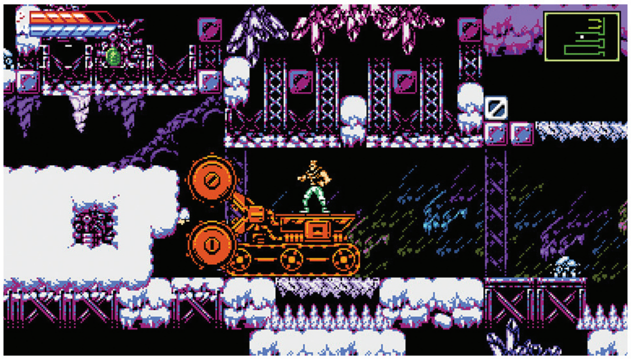
As for this year, the game is already turning heads. It recently won the Best Booth award at MAGFest 2024, where one player reportedly played it for over five hours, digging into its massive map, finding exploits to push through the adventure faster and delighting in the little details that make this 8-bit Transylvania feel like a living, breathing world. It's heading to PAX East in March as well, so be sure to check it out if you're going to that show.

The Transylvania Adventure of Simon Quest provides the perfect antidote for the stumbling stiffness that plagued the "real" Simon's Quest back in the '80s, while being a rollicking and spirited ride in its own right!

Programancer is partnering with Retroware to publish the game on Switch, and they have a history of offering physical carts of their titles. So maybe this won't be eShop-only? Stay tuned! **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: RETROWARE
DEVELOPER: PROGRAMANCER
RELEASE: TBA 2025 RATING: RP





# Throwback to the Future

## PRISON CITY

**AFTER COUNTLESS HOMAGES** to classics like Castlevania, Contra and Metroid, indies have inevitably begun treading into more esoteric waters for their retro tributes. The latest such endeavor is Prison City, a spiritual successor to Power Blade, an unsung action/platforming gem of the NES era – and a personal childhood fave!

But while I'm grateful this game exists, it's just not as tight a package as it ought to be.

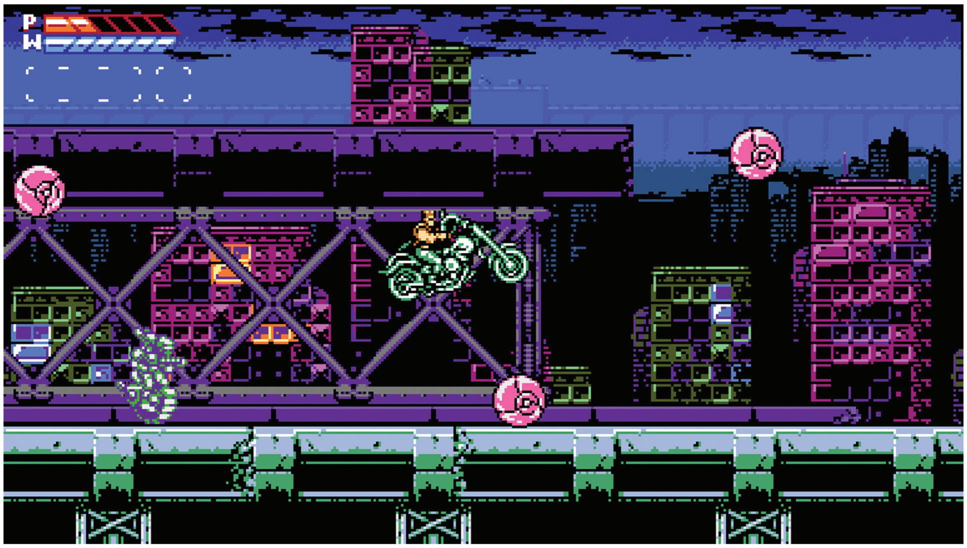
Power Blade's main gimmick was that the hero fought not with a gun or sword but with a boomerang, the physics of which opened up combat in fun and often unexpected directions. Meanwhile, Prison City's Hal tears up the mean streets of post-apocalyptic Detroit with a Chakram, which is like a boomerang, but offers much more direct control in comparison. Not only can you angle the Chakram's trajectory after you've thrown it, you can also temporarily lock it in midair, then arc it clockwise or counterclockwise like a spinning minute hand of death!

Though you'd think such functionality would trivialize combat, you still have to contend with hardy enemies and a weapon meter that reduces the strength of your Chakram the faster you spam it. I do miss how quickly you could dispatch common mooks in Power Blade, as their fragility allowed you to maintain a brisk gait through a level. In Prison City, on the other hand, foes are often a touch too tough, resulting in stuttered pacing that exacerbates Hal's already slow walking speed.

You can upgrade to the Power Chakram by collecting three Upgrade tokens, though these are hidden in specific item boxes throughout the map rather than dropped by any enemies. And while your beefed-up weapon is drastically stronger and sports a wider area of effect, its power vanishes if you take three hits. This is akin to the armored suit in Power Blade, only in that game you needed merely to pick up a single item token, and the armor itself absorbed those three hits. Given how large some of Prison City's maps are – meaning significant backtracking is required to recollect Upgrades upon a lost life – the Power Chakram hardly feels like an adequate reward.

I do dig the bosses, though! As with the overall Escape from New York trappings, bosses typically take cues from other '80s pop culture sources – such as Fury Rhoads, who's essentially Lord Humungus from Mad Max 2, or Jumbotron, which sports four rotating faces like the G1 Transformers' Quintessons! These encounters can be rather exhausting, unfortunately, as their health bars are so massive and yours is so tiny. Then there's the Coolant Drive, fought by playing a game of Pong, only instead of operating a paddle, you have to scale a chain-link wall and toss your Chakram to deflect the orb – creative on paper, but fussy and grating in practice.

I enjoyed Prison City enough, even if I didn't outright love it. I'm mostly glad my excessively particular gaming desires are gradually being addressed at long last! Who would've thought Power Blade would inspire a modern homage?! **– TONY**



**7.0**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: RETROWARE
DEVELOPER: PROGRAMANCER
RATING: E10+

# The Sun Rises Once More

## GOLDEN SUN & GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE

**THE FIRST TWO** games in the Golden Sun trilogy have been made available for folks able to access Nintendo Switch Online's expansion pack. Those venturing into this rewarding series need to know one thing: You should definitely alter the settings of the emulator before you start the game. Adding in the scan-lines by enabling "Reproduce classic feel" and changing it to present in the original aspect ratio is essential for this pair of games! Much like sprites of the SNES era that the GBA pulled so much inspiration from, these graphics were designed for scanlines. On old cathode ray tube TVs (CRTs) and the GBA screen, pixels would blur and round slightly to produce the look the designers were going for. If these features are not turned on, much of the design is lost in a blocky, ugly mess! The rich, hand-drawn backgrounds, the depth and emotion of the character sprites and the impressive effects really shine through with the right settings.

The first Golden Sun is the tale of Isaac, Garet, Mia and Ivan. Isaac and Garet live in Vale, which is located on Mt. Aleph, the mountain known to harbor the four elemental stars in its Sol Sanctum. These stars make the folks living in Vale "Adepts" with the power to control certain elements. Isaac is a Venus Adept who has earth powers, and Garet is a Mars Adept who can conjure fire. The spells – or "Psynergy" – they can use will change alongside their class once they connect with a Djinni.

Djinn are little creatures that can be found and obtained through direct battle or game events. You can combine several of them to enhance stats or focus on specific Psynergy.

If none of that made sense, it's fine. It took me a while to figure it all out too, and the game doesn't hold your hand through it, essentially throwing a ton of jargon at you like I just did. Sometimes you need access to Psynergy in the field to freeze or grow something, and you'll need to rearrange Djinn to gain that access. To complicate things further, Djinn can also allow your party to use summons . . . that you must also find. Putting Djinn in Standby Mode allows you to use their element to call the summons in battle, at the cost of class stats. It can be frustrating not knowing the weaknesses of bosses to set up what you need ahead of time, but trial, error and resetting is the way to play. Luckily you can save your game anywhere, and I recommend doing it often.

Back to the story! Isaac's village is attacked by Saturos and Menardi, Adepts who are trying to bring Alchemy – a power that was sealed away for nearly destroying the world in a previous age – back to the world of Weyard. You'll essentially be chasing the pair the whole game, as they activate the lighthouses that keep each element's power in check.

GBA NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: CAMELOT
ORIGINAL RELEASES: NOVEMBER 12, 2001 & APRIL 14, 2003

Isaac also comes across Mercury Adept Mia, who heals with water, and Jupiter Adept Ivan, who is a Wind Seer. This quartet goes from town to dungeon to cave to lighthouse to try to thwart the powerful villains, but there are also several distractions: minigames in the town of Tolbi, treasure chests to figure out how to get to and plenty of grinding.

Grinding isn't as painful in this game because battles are quick and relatively easy, leaving the challenge to bosses, but unleashing all of your powerful summons and Psynergy on a boss can make those battles feel one-sided as well. If you buy new armor whenever it's available and find the good weapons in chests, the game is fairly easy.

Conversely, the dungeon puzzles can be real head-scratchers. Whether it be moving and hopping on pillars or rolling logs to get through, you'll be spending extra time to progress.

Golden Sun: The Lost Age is less a sequel and more of a Chapter 2, picking up from the epilogue of the previous game. After putting in the longest password I'd ever entered to connect the games, I was ready to have my beefed-up party from Golden Sun make some heads roll! Instead I assumed the role of new hero Felix . . . at Level 5. No matter though, as Felix is another formidable Venus Adept from Vale who Isaac and Garet actually failed to save due to Saturos and Menardi's attack. In fact, Felix worked *with* the villains in the first chapter because *they* ended up saving him, and he also tries to protect Jupiter Adept Sheba from them during his tenure. After being separated from them, he and Sheba join his Mars Adept sister Jenna and Mercury Adept Piers as they explore the new-to-them continent of Indra. Immediately you realize enemies are tougher, dungeons are longer and the puzzles are more complex. I barely made it through some early areas, and I hadn't changed my playstyle from the last game!

The stories are epic and far-reaching with lots of memorable characters and settings: Dead pirates, werewolves, sea trips, deserts, mountains, gladiators, gambling, wizard battles, cute creatures and deadly dragons. This RPG series hits all the high-fantasy high points! The music in both games really pushed the GBA to its limit as well, cranking out memorable tunes that were spot-on for its epic feel and intimate presentation.

Golden Sun is a series I'd love to see remastered with the same love as Super Mario RPG, and it's definitely a brand worthy of having more eyes on its games. Take advantage of this re-release of its first two adventures, and hope with me that this franchise's star rises again! **— BRETT**

**8.5**

# From Out of Left Field
## EXCITEBIKE 64

**I STILL REMEMBER** being shocked by this game's announcement. Excitebike had been an NES launch title way back in 1985, and while it had been a fun enough little racing game, it didn't seem like it was going to inspire a series. That thought was reinforced when its 16-bit follow-up, a visually enhanced version starring Mario characters, was kept locked in Japan and only released for their Satellaview service. So I remember being genuinely surprised when we were drawing near to the end of the N64 era and all of a sudden, from out of nowhere, this new sequel was announced! And, even more shocking: It was good! Great, even!

Left Field Productions, who'd previously made their mark on the N64 hardware by developing the first two NBA Courtside games starring Kobe Bryant, totally reimagined and revamped Excitebike's sidescrolling motocross simulation into a fully 3D racing spectacle. Excitebike 64 brought the gamers of the year 2000 into the slop of dirty, muddy motorcycle racetracks, and kept us coming back for more with its tight controls and tough difficulty level that meant no one would be breezing through its challenges in just their first attempt.

Playing it again today, it doesn't handle quite as well as my memories remember – there has been a lot of innovation in the racing genre in the last two decades, and play control feels so much tighter when, say, you're riding a motorcycle in Mario Kart 8 Deluxe versus the handling you're handed here. It really makes me wish Excitebike would get another new surprise sequel, to take advantage of more modern innovations in that area. How cool would it be if the Mario Kart team were allowed to deviate from their core responsibilities to whip something like that up?

But, in the absence of such a sequel, it's nice to have this one to revisit. It's especially fun to re-experience Excitebike 64's unlockables, like its Soccer mode, which predated and surely inspired the wildly popular Rocket League with its "vehicles play soccer with a huge ball" idea. The Big N has brought that same idea back again themselves in both Metroid Prime: Federation Force's Blast Ball mode as well as Nintendo Switch Sports' Soccer event. It's neat to go back and see their first take on it again. (Or Left Field's first take, I suppose!) **– LUCAS**

**8.0**

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: LEFT FIELD PRODUCTIONS ORIGINAL RELEASE: MAY 2, 2000

# Farm Land and Find Love
## HARVEST MOON 64

**HARVEST MOON 64** was only the second title in the Bokujō Monogatari series, and in many parts of the world this is the first time it's being released, after it was thought the rights to it outside Japan were held up between previous publisher Natsume and current publisher XSEED. While many of its gameplay mechanics resemble those from the first Harvest Moon on Super Nintendo, it is here where several of the seeds that modern farming sims grew from were planted – and not just later games in this same franchise, but spin-offs like Rune Factory and inspired titles like Harvestella and Stardew Valley.

You play as the grandson of a recently deceased farmer, inheriting his overgrown farm in Flower Bud Village, a tiny hamlet inspired by rural Japan. In the span of two years, you'll not only need to revive the farm by raising crops and livestock, but also assist with improving the town, participate in festivals with your fellow villagers, and also find love.

Unfortunately, the overall presentation leaves a lot to be desired – the dialogue was given a literal translation and is littered with typos and other errors, and one of the game's TV stations was removed entirely instead of being translated, due to space limitations. The environmental graphics are especially blocky, especially in town, where the buildings assemble themselves as you walk by. The controls are a little fiddly, especially when you need to position your farmer to water several crops at once, and I never could get the hang of fishing, which requires fast reflexes.

Despite all this, your fellow Flower Bud Villagers feel like real people, and there's much more emphasis on building relationships than sowing crops – certain villagers will pack up and leave if you keep them at arm's length, for example. This was the first game to include rival marriages, which also adds to the sense of time passing in an otherwise endless farm sim, and your fellow villagers deal with some heavy topics as well.

While it still feels very rustic, Harvest Moon 64 has held up fairly well over the years, and for those who really miss the rival marriage mechanic, this is a good place to revisit it. However, if you want something that looks and feels a little more solid, keep your fingers crossed that the Friends of Mineral Town games are added to the Game Boy Advance lineup of Nintendo Switch Online. **– REBECCA**

**7.0**

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NATSUME DEVELOPER: VICTOR INTERACTIVE ORIGINAL RELEASE: DECEMBER 22, 1999

# The Peak of the First Party Era

## MARIO PARTY 3

**THE CELLULAR SHOPPER** strikes again!

Introduced as an item here in Mario Party 3 for the first time in the series (and then kicked out of the franchise immediately afterward for how overpowered it was), the Cellular Shopper is a simple cellphone that only costs five coins to buy and works as a mobile item shop. When you use it, you can call up Toad to buy another item from him – like a Magic Lamp. Then the Lamp, when used, picks you up from wherever you are on the board and delivers you straight to the Star Space. The whole sequence takes a total of three turns and 45 coins, but if you can get your hands on a Shopper and are reasonably good at earning coins in minigames, you can reliably rack up Stars very quickly.

Oh, and the Shoppers are for sale as early as Turn 1.

Mario Party 3 was released at a time when this franchise was still quite young, and it includes a few of those examples of broken or unbalanced game mechanics. But that's what makes it so much fun! This game first launched right in the middle of my college years, and it quickly became the favorite of my friend group after we discovered that Shopper meta and went wild with it, constantly trying to outbuy each other on digital cellphones.

Now that it's on NSO, I've been able to pull the same old trick on my kids, and their shock was so satisfying. They've really come to despise the old Mario Party N64 games in just a handful of times trying them out, and I'm just sitting back, smiling – like, yes, that's exactly the right reaction. These games are maddening. This is what the whole franchise was built on.

I think Mario Party 3 is the peak of the series' first era (though I do miss the costumes of Party 2). You and your family and friends should absolutely fire it up at least once now that it's available on NSO. The game looks phenomenal thanks to the higher resolution at which the graphics are being displayed. The control is great (if your controllers are still in good shape at this point; Calvin had trouble with precise movements in some minigames because he had our "wonky" Pro Controller). This was Waluigi and Daisy's playable debut game. It's got a lot going for it!

But mostly the Celluar Shoppers. My all-time favorite! **– LUCAS**

**9.5**

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT
ORIGINAL RELEASE: MAY 7, 2001

# Now in Glorious 1080p
## 1080° SNOWBOARDING

**OK, SO I** don't actually know that 1080° Snowboarding is rendered at a 1080p resolution on the Switch. I'm not a tech expert like the fine folks over at the Digital Foundry! But by golly, I'm going to claim it here, since Nintendo has sadly never given us a true HD sequel in this series, robbing us of a real chance to ever use that headline with confidence.

The Big N has a whole lot of lapsed, sleeping franchises, but 1080° is one that saddens me more than most. This N64 original just oozed "cool" when it was first released over a quarter of a century ago, and its direct sequel on the GameCube, 1080° Avalanche, was even more beautiful and thrilling to play. Nintendo's push into extreme sports sims was brief, but like Excitebike 64, it was great.

1080° is a little harder to revisit than Excitebike, though, as the latter includes a robust tutorial mode to teach you all the controls of handling your motorcycle and how to pull off tricks – whereas this game is more hands-off. It just kind of drops you off on the mountain and lets you figure out the controls yourself! This kind of lack of in-game assistance with learning how to play wasn't so striking back when physical game manuals were still a thing, but with these NSO re-releases, Nintendo has not included those materials – so you can try to trial-and-error your way to understanding, or else turn to Google to search for those old references.

Taking the time to really acquaint yourself with the controls and handling of the snowboards is essential for enjoyment here, as 1080° is the kind of "old-school hard" game that pulls no punches right out of the gate. Your very first race against a computer-controlled opponent, on the easiest difficulty setting, demands near-perfection in your execution if you want to reach the finish line first. And you have to if you want to proceed: 1080°'s races are one-on-one events, so if you ain't first, you're last! (And then you're forced to try again from the starting line.)

That can be frustrating . . . but also rewarding, if you do take the time to really learn how to play well. The sense of speed, carving through the snow and pulling off the titular spinning jumps through the air before landing safely? It's glorious. It makes me even more wistful for when this game was first brand-new, and even more hopeful that Nintendo will one day revisit this series.

Give 1080° a spin! **– LUCAS**

**8.0**

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: APRIL 1, 1998

# Rare Misses the Mark
## JET FORCE GEMINI

**LET'S NOT SUGARCOAT** the issue: Jet Force Gemini has truly dreadful play control.

Even when it was first released on the N64 nearly 25 years ago, its convoluted control scheme was the biggest issue called out by the reviewers of the day. "Control mechanics feel clumsy at times, often transforming what should be a relatively simple task into a lesson in frustration," said Matt Casamassina's IGN evaluation. Nelson Taruc, writing for Gamespot, said "the awkwardness in using two very different control styles in the same game might prove distasteful to some." He's right. It did!

The problem is that Rare's developers just tried to do a little too much. They wanted to make a third-person run-and-gun shooter, but the N64's controller wasn't too well-suited to handle that – so they split Jet Force Gemini's control scheme into two different styles that constantly bounce back and forth between one another. There's the control style that helps you run and jump around the environments fairly well, but it's not too useful for targeting and blasting enemies. So you can then switch to an alternate method of control that gives you a targeting reticule and helps you better aim your shots . . . but it removes the ability to jump and shifts the movement controls entirely too.

I played through almost all of Jet Force Gemini on original hardware 25 years ago, so I was able to adapt well enough back then. But taking that already-complex double control scheme and now remapping it all to a Switch Pro Controller, or a pair of Joy-Cons? Nah. It's not happening. There is just no good way to get comfortable playing this on Switch.

With is a shame, since there are a ton of fun ideas to be found in this innovative game design! Jet Force Gemini was kind of the in-between game for Rare in this era: halfway between their colorful, cartoony 3D platformers like Banjo-Kazooie and their first-person shooters like Perfect Dark and GoldenEye. It included early shades of the M-rated humor that would later define Conker's Bad Fur Day too, when horrible violence is visited upon cuddly creatures in cutscenes. I genuinely would've loved to be able to fully enjoy an encore playthrough.

But, alas, the controls. Subject yourself to the torture at your own risk. **– LUCAS**

**6.0**

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RARE
ORIGINAL RELEASE: OCTOBER 11, 1999

# To Protect, You Must Destroy!

## BLAST CORPS

**AFTER HITTING RARE** with a fair degree of criticism for the too-tough-to-control Jet Force Gemini, let me now pivot right back to praise for one of their earlier efforts in the N64 era: the incredible Blast Corps!

Rare was beyond prolific as a second-party developer in those days, ultimately shipping 11 different N64 titles in a span of just 4.5 years. Blast Corps was just their second release of those 11, shipping to store shelves in the 64-bit console's early days and becoming one of the first real showpieces for the system.

Because you could blow stuff up! You could rampage through 3D environments and destroy everything in sight. And you were supposed to! That was the whole goal! You were a hero if you leveled entire towns.

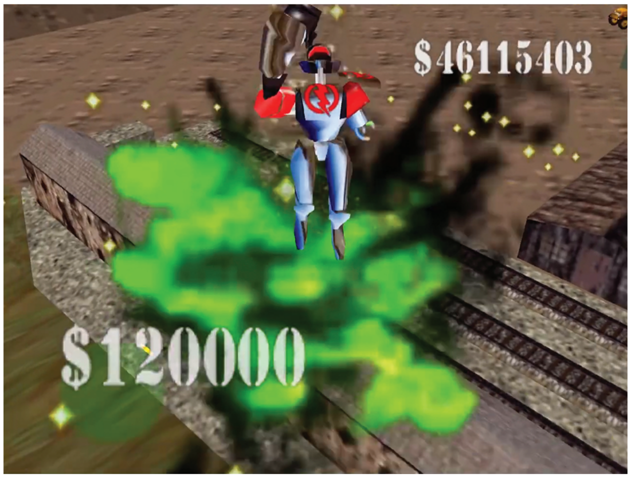
The reason is that there's a truck carrying nuclear missiles that has lost control – its steering has become unresponsive, and its speed can't be slowed down. It's moving straight forward, no matter what! So the government calls on you to get out in front of this runaway carrier and destroy any obstacles in its path. If it hits anything – a building, a box, even some farmer's fenceline out in the middle of nowhere – then a nuclear explosion will wipe out everyone and everything for miles around! You can't let that much destruction happen, so to prevent it, you have to cause controlled destruction just along its dangerous heading.

Blast Corps starts you out with a simple bulldozer to bust through buildings, but the game quickly introduces a whole garage full of increasingly crazy vehicles to use to blow buildings apart. There's the Ballista, a motorcycle equipped with twin rocket launchers. The Skyfall, a car that jumps off ramps to crush structures below. The J-Bomb, a flying mech suit that soars into the sky and then flattens buildings by essentially pulling off Mario's Ground Pound maneuver on top of them, and the Thunderfist, another robot with one huge arm that causes its kind of chaos by rolling along the ground in front of buildings and then uppercutting them from their foundations!

There are more than just those, too, and each one is a different kind of fun. Some of them are tricky to control, though – sometimes to the point of frustration. (The controls here are never as aggravating as Jet Force Gemini's, but there is a learning curve.)

Take the Backlash, for example. It's a dump truck that destroys buildings by racing toward them to gather speed, then quickly flipping around to drift into them with its backside. That can be hard to handle – and you can't just take your sweet time to get it right, either, because that runaway nuclear carrier is always bearing down on your position, so you have to clear the way and then get out of the way yourself before it rolls through! (I may or may not have failed a level by destroying all the buildings in the path but then accidentally drifting straight into the nuclear rig with the Backlash. Oops.)

If you have a bit of patient and perseverance, you can have a lot of fun with Blast Corps. This is another classic one-off video game that never got a remake or a sequel, and it deserves both! Maybe an indie team could use this idea if Rare's not going to any more. **– LUCAS**




N64 NSO
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RARE
ORIGINAL RELEASE: MARCH 24, 1997

**8.5**

# Searching for Self-Identity

## THIRSTY SUITORS

**GOING BY ITS NAME,** you may think Thirsty Suitors is about a combination juice bar and business menswear warehouse. Or maybe you'd guess it's a dating sim about amorous courters trying to woo your protagonist! While that dynamic is part of the game, it's far from the focal point of this poignant, well-told story. A better name for it might be "Passive Aggressive Hometown Hijinks" or "Bisexual Adult Child of Southeast Asian Immigrants Searches for Identity in the Face of Cripplingly High Expectations." (Or BACO SAIS FIIT FACHE for short).

That last one may be too long, but it's still not detailed enough to describe everything Thirsty Suitors sets out to do. Using classic "game-y" conceits like skateboarding action, turn-based RPG battles and cooking minigames to propel a deeply compelling narrative is no small feat. At the center of it all is Jala, a woman in her 20s, hot off a bad breakup, living with her parents and reconciling with her past. It's a lot like something you might find in a Young Adult novel, which is why I asked my partner Catherine, a librarian and expert on YA Lit, to weigh in on this game too. Here are her thoughts:

Jala's interactions with her mother are fraught with the precise kind of disappointment that will resonate deeply with anyone who's feared rejection from those they love. Her underlying fear is that she is unlovable and unacceptable, and this anxiety underscores almost every battle and conversation in the game. When she contends against the animosity of her exes (her primary boss battles), she's making amends with the people upon whom she foisted her insecurities and self-doubt. They aren't the "bad guys" and neither is Jala. They're all just people, doing their best.

This relentless empathy is offered to the whole cast. Jala's Mom may be a source of some of her insecurities, but she still fights for Jala as a "Summon Mom" attack, tearing into "skate hooligans" and other trouble-makers about town. And her father, a consistently light, loving and supportive man, is the one who revives her after losing in battle. Her body-building Aunt Chandra is also a summon, who can take Jala through Rocky-esque training montages mid-conflict.

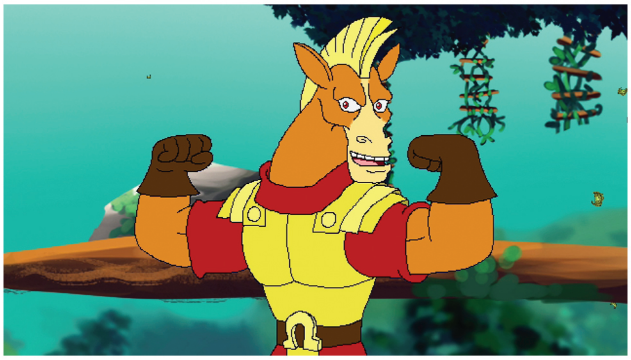
It's amazing to see a game where the lead draws upon on her culture, her family and, eventually, a burgeoning sense of self-respect, to transform her toxic relationships into amicable, healthy connections. The art, music and voice acting are all fantastic as well, filled with spark and color. My only complaints come from maneuvering the skating, battle and cooking segments. Although I was always excited to get to the next chapter of the story, these bits sometimes led me to put the game down in frustration. Accessibility options can make them easier, or turn them off completely, but ironically, doing so made me feel like I was "cheating," or too incompetent to play it right. So, while I love that Thirsty Suitors challenges people to experience an original story about a marginalized woman finding self-actualization, the challenge of actually playing was sometimes unfun.

Catherine isn't keen on scoring games, but given its fantastic story and occasional roadblocks that kept her from smoothly moving through it, she's giving it an 8.5 out of 10.

**– JONATHAN (& CATHERINE)**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ANNAPURNA INT. DEVELOPER: OUTERLOOP GAMES RATING: T

**8.5**



# An All-New Homage to the CD-i Zeldas

## ARZETTE: THE JEWEL OF FARAMORE

**ARZETTE IS BUILT** around answering a very unusual question: What if the CD-i Zelda games were *good?* Not just "What if there was a good game that happened to look like the CD-i Zelda games?" – but what if someone actually took the core tenants of those often-maligned mishaps and made them work?

It's a question that you'd have to be crazy to ask. Those games are an unmitigated disaster, right? Believe it or not, there's actually more to them than you might think!

Link: The Faces of Evil and Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon are not good games, but unlike their reputation suggests, they aren't without some degree of merit. What Seedy Eye Software (get it?) has done here is create something that is at its core exactly the same kind of game, just without the old tragic flaws.

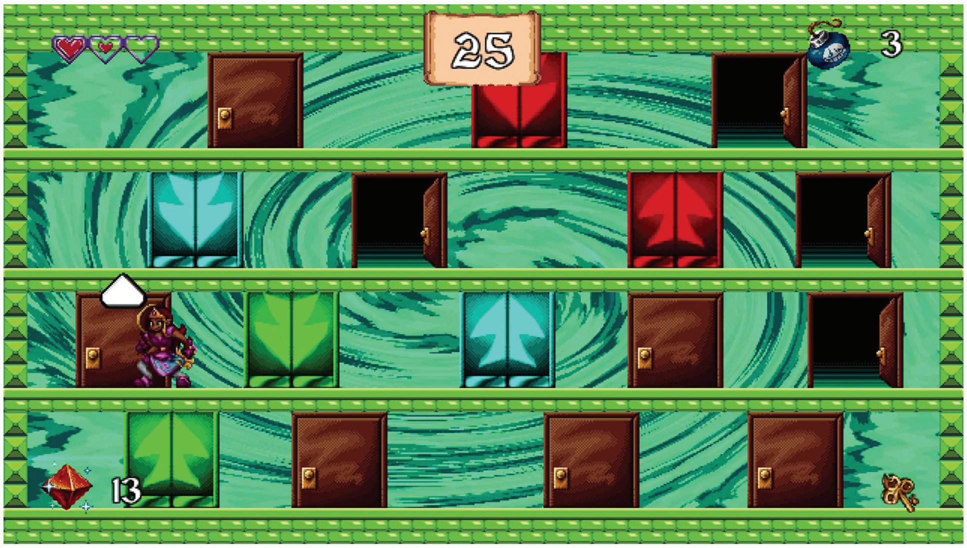
Like its inspirations, Arzette is an action/adventure platformer that's all about talking to people and helping them solve their problems, which in turn grants the player new information and abilities to aid in their ultimate quest to save the world. The problem with those older games was never their structure, it was how they played – a problem Arzette doesn't have at all. Controls are tight, and the combat and platforming are actually pretty fun! Most importantly, though, executing basic actions like opening doors and picking up items is as intuitive as it should be. This may not sound like much, but if you've ever played the CD-i Zelda games, you know that's kind of a big deal. You also might recognize some of the voices, since they actually tracked down a couple of the original voice actors to lend their talents to the experience!

What I wasn't expecting was just how earnest a send-up this game really is. It would have been easy to create something that constantly pokes fun at itself, but that's not what's happening here. Every character you meet is as off-the-wall bonkers as the ones on display in the old games, but it's all done without even a shred of self-deprecation – and that includes the protagonist. Arzette is a well-written, wonderfully charming character. She's very much a part of this world, albeit slightly more grounded than most. So when she meets a member of the game's menagerie of weirdos, she takes their odd personalities in stride, and even makes the occasional cheesy remark in return. (And when she meets someone who is truly nuts, even by this game's standards, she reacts appropriately.) The game is funny without turning itself into a joke, which is quite a feat.

Still, even with this formula as polished as it is, Arzette was inspired by fundamentally flawed games, which keeps it a step behind its contemporaries. It's relatively short, has some odd story beats and most of the boss encounters are underwhelming. If you have a soft spot for the CD-i, tack another point onto the score. If not, there's still a genuinely fun game here with enough cleverness and weird animation to make it worth playing. **– KRIS**

**7.5**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: LIMITED RUN GAMES DEVELOPER: SEEDY EYE SOFTWARE RATING: E10+



# Mental Health is Important, Kids

## POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

### THE HIDDEN TREASURE OF AREA ZERO, PART 2: THE INDIGO DISK

**KIERAN NEEDS THERAPY.**

Seriously, I've played M-rated Kotaro Uchikoshi games full of unhinged antagonists, and I think each one of them had more mental stability than this poor, traumatized Pokémon Trainer. I didn't want to battle this kid. I didn't want to grind his team into the ground with Super Effective hits. I just wanted to stop everything that was happening and give him a hug!

I complained about the lack of player agency in my review of Part 1 of the Scarlet & Violet DLC a couple of issues ago, upset that progressing through the story of The Teal Mask meant forcing your character to lie to Kieran, repeatedly, and basically cause all of his emotional damage. Now, after invading Kieran's home region of Kitakami, continuously destroying him in battle there and catching all of that land's Legendary Pokémon – including his childhood favorite, Ogerpon – your "hero" character follows Kieran and his sister Carmine to their school, the Blueberry Academy in the distant Unova region, to keep piling more defeats on this same pitiable child.

Some time has passed since the events of The Teal Mask concluded, though. Kieran has reinvented himself, restyled his hair and has risen through the ranks to become the Blueberry Academy Champion. So you have to travel around the grounds of Blueberry's expansive Terarium, divided into four different biomes all full of Pokémon previously uncatchable in Paldea or Kitakami, before you can face him.

I did genuinely enjoy the non-Kieran parts of this DLC adventure. The Terarium is a fun environment, equally divided into four quadrants: the Savannah, Coastal, Canyon and Polar Biomes. There's a new Elite 4 character to find and face in each area, and you have to complete a small minigame to earn the right to battle them.

Then, when you do battle them, the battles are actually tough! All of Blueberry Academy's fights are Double Battles, the opposing 'mons are always somewhere in the 70s or 80s level-wise, and these Trainers actually employ good strategies – none of it is a cakewalk, even if you go in with your souped-up team of Paldean Champions and Kitakami Legendaries. It's rare that Pokémon games offer anything approaching real challenge in battle. It's nice!

But after triumphing over the Blueberry Elite 4, you're flung right back in Kieran's face and have to stomp him all over again.

It's all just so narratively boring. You have to win to keep the story moving. You're forced to be victorious in every fight, every time, or else it's just "Game Over, Try Again." I tried losing on purpose! I tried just giving Kieran the win he literally is crying for in the cutscenes. But you can't do that. You're not allowed to lose.

The Pokémon TV show has been so much more satisfying than the games in this regard, over decades' worth of episodes now. Sometimes Ash Ketchum would challenge a Gym Leader and, *gasp!*, he would lose! He would fail. And that was OK! The show would go on, showing how he'd rally his team and calm his emotions and do some extra training and try again. And then he'd win the rematch, to keep making progress.

DLC PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK RATING: E

7.5

I'm just tired of winning Pokémon battles at this point. Being forced to repeatedly defeat this same pitiful kid has made me realize that. It's not fun any more! These games really need a narrative shake-up – they need to allow you to lose, and to have characters react to that with dialogue for that scenario, instead of just always "whiting out" the screen and saying "You hurried to the nearest Pokémon Center as fast as you could!". The Pokémon series has a lot of problems that need fixing, but this is one I hope they'll get to someday.

Kieran kind of comes around in the end of the tale. You ultimately travel with him and Carmine back to Area Zero in Paldea, and you explore deeper down into the earth than where the main games' story took you before their credits rolled. You venture through an honestly great-looking underground crystal-filled cave system and finally come face to face with Terapagos, the turtle-like Legendary who can Terastallize into the new Stellar Tera Type, which brings all 18 other Pokémon types together into one.

It's a high-stake finale and, again, an honestly difficult battle. I liked that a lot. Kieran losing his mind and lashing out to attack you *yet again* in the final moments? That's insane. My goodness does this kid need to just *let it go.*

Overall I enjoyed The Indigo Disk better than The Teal Mask, as the exploration of Blueberry Academy felt more fun than everything that went on in the Kitakami region.

There are some fun extras, like being able to take direct control of your Pokémon by using a "Synchro Machine" and upgrading Koraidon/ Miraidon with full flight capabilities. There are a handful of all-new monsters to discover, too, like the new multi-headed Hydrapple and the past/future forms of old Legendaries like Entei and Terrakion.

The games continued to be plagued by technical problems, as I frequently hit single-digit framerates and sometimes the music would just cut out entirely. But I didn't expect improvement there, so I wasn't dis-appointed when there was none.

Kieran, though. Get that kid some help. **– LUCAS**

SECOND OPINION

## PECHARUNT REVEALS ITSELF

**THE TEAL MASK** was fun, but The Indigo Disk is better!

First up, new Pokémon! There are seven: Archaludon, Terapagos, Raging Bolt, Iron Crown, Gouging Fire, Iron Boulder and Hydrapple. That's the same number as The Teal Mask, but it feels like fewer, since six of them can't be caught in the Terarium: Only Duraludon can be caught and evolved with the new Metal Alloy item. That's it!

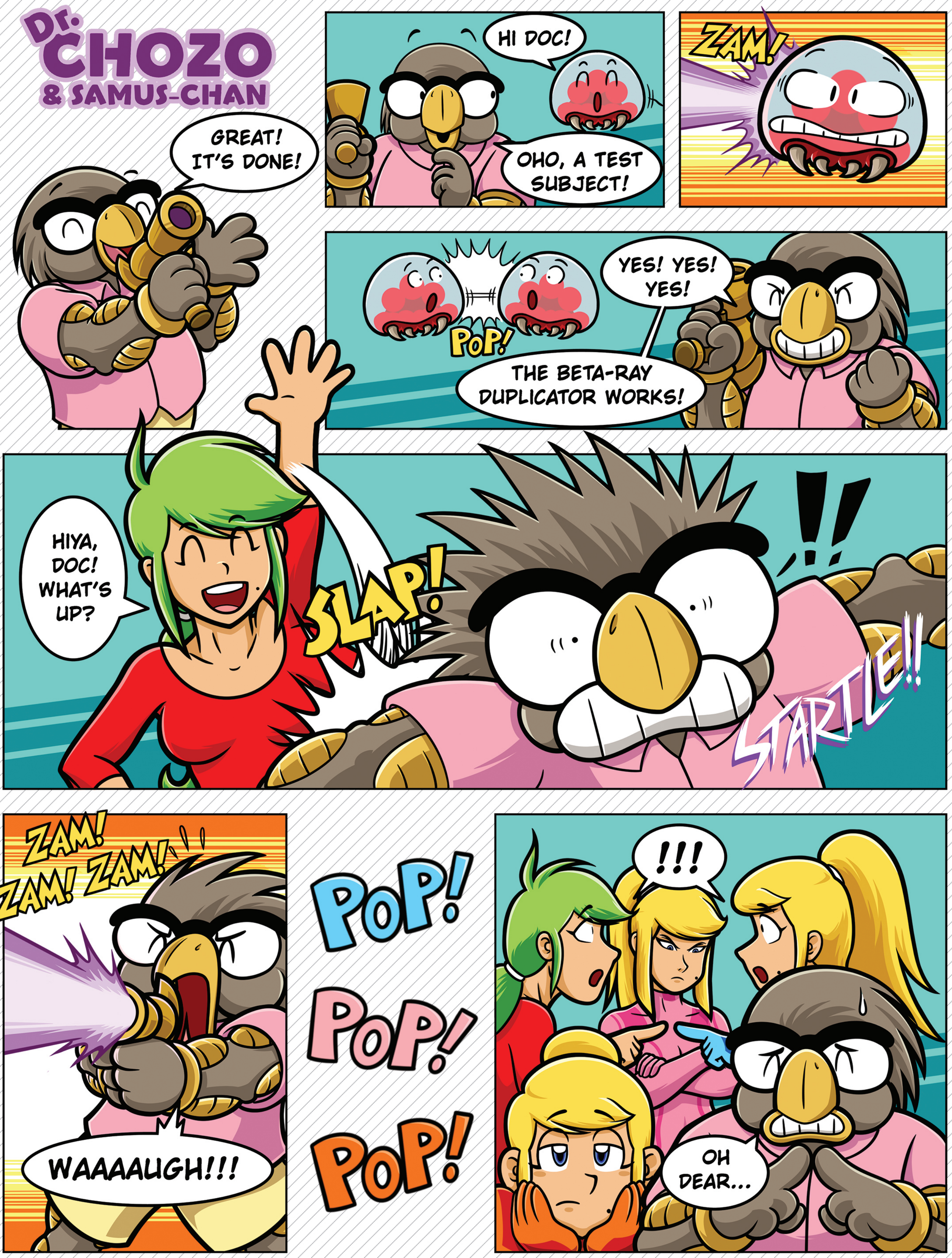
There's a new Perrin quest if you've beaten the one in Kitakami: This time, you have to catch 200 out of 240 total Pokémon in the Blueberry Dex – which is quite a challenge! You can only get the first 162 + Terapagos in the Dex by normal means. For the rest, you'll need to collect 3,000 BP to upgrade a Biome and make six First Partner Pokémon begin to appear there, which will boost your Dex by (at most) 18. The rewards are worth the effort, though, as you get the past forms of Raikou and Entei or the future forms of Cobalion and Terrakion.

If you want another person who helps you find Legendaries, look no further! Mr. Snacksworth, unlocked after you beat the story, will give you Legendary-attracting snacks after you do lots of BBQs. These Pokémon include the Kanto bird trio, all Johto's Legends, all from Hoenn (minus the Regis), the box Legends from Unova, Alola and Galar, Kubfu, Glastrier and Spectrier. Another fun feature!

Last but not least, there's a final quest to take on after you beat the Indigo Disk story. To start it, go to Mystery Gift, select Via the Internet, choose the Mythical Peach Berry gift and then examine the toy at Peachy's shop in Mossui Town. This starts "Mochi Mayhem," an epilogue involving Arven, Nemona, Penny, Carmine, Kieran and the new Mythical Pokémon, Pecharunt. It's all over in less than an hour, but it's a fun way to cap off Gen IX. (Also, the story is far superior to what was before, as many characters behave hilariously. Play it for yourself to see how!)

Even if the story wasn't great, overall The Hidden Treasure of Area Zero has been really fun to play! **– CARTER**

9.5




BY THOR THORVALDSON

# PRINCESS PEACH THE ERAS TOUR

# AMORPHOUS FUNGUS

**TODAY, PRINCESS PEACH** is one of the most recognizable characters in the world. But back in 1985, when Super Mario Bros. first hit the scene and marked her debut, no one in North America had any idea what she looked like!

In fact, it could be argued that seeing what she looked like served as a driving motivation for some of us to topple the Turtle Tribe and free the fair fungus — she was known simply as "Princess Toadstool" at the time, by the way — from her imprisonment. Restoring peace to the lands of the Mushroom Kingdom? Sure, that'd be nice too.

But was she a fungus among us? A human? Or was she something else? Depictions differed, and even Nintendo's own official materials depicted her in different ways, ranging from an almost baby doll-like visage on the Japanese/PAL cover for the game (also used on various merchandise) to a more regal form of Toad in Nintendo's own official guide, "How to Win at Super Mario Bros." (Art from which would go on to be used to advertise Nintendo's wares in numerous places, such as Sears' annual Wish Book catalogs.)

Heck, even the included bestiary in the instruction booklet packaged with every copy of the game didn't provide any further clues! In the back, lineart renditions of every pixelated character in the game (except for Mario and Luigi) were featured, from the lowly Little Goomba all the way up to the Mushroom Retainers found at the end of the first seven worlds, and even Bowser, King of the Koopa himself. *[Note to editors: That's how "Koopa" was spelled there, no "s".]*

Our fair lady was listed there too, of course. However, for her visual, all that was there was a lone question mark!

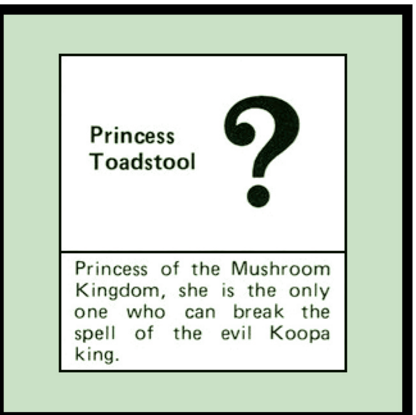
In the days of my youth before I'd come to see for myself what she actually looked like, I seriously considered that maybe she actually *did* look like a question mark. I mean, everyone else looked like their entries, so maybe . . . ?

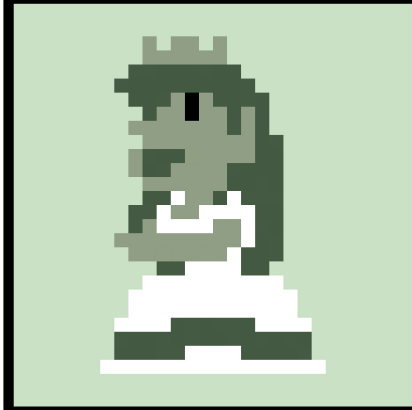
The truth, however, was something else entirely — and honestly just as surprising if Super Mario Bros. was your first exposure to the series as if it was your last, as she only barely resembled what she looks like today.

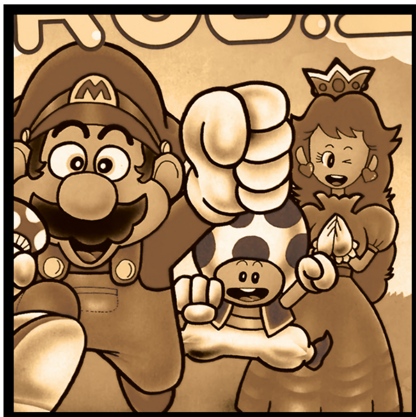
Rather than the long, canary blonde hair which we know her by today, she instead sported hair as red as the lava Mario plunged Bowser into just moments before. And instead of her pink dress, she wore a flowing white gown, with a bit of red trim along its fringe. She was also absent her gloves, but not her crimson lipstick, which took up two pixels of height from the seven comprising her face.

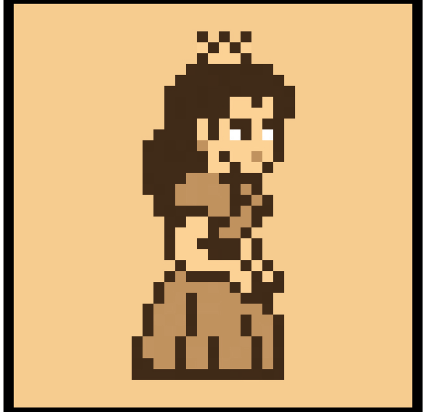
That's not to say that this version of her highness was *completely* enclosed behind the completion of World 8-4, however. At least one piece of merchandise managed to sneak past Nintendo's ninjas and reveal her likeness to the world: The Super Mario Bros. board game from Milton Bradley featured her on its cover, albeit with a browner shade of hair than in the game, and her dress was more aqua in color. Still, colors aside, it was unmistakably her.

This look has resurfaced more in recent years, such as when Peach grabs a Fire Flower. Though her hair remains blonde, the dress is unmistakable, and it similarly serves as an alternate color in Smash Bros. Most recently, however, in addition to the aforementioned Fire Flower scenario, Peach does also wear a white wedding dress at the end of The Super Mario Bros. Movie, perhaps as another reference to her first rescue? **— DAVID**







# BRASSY BRUNETTE

**THOUGH SHE DEBUTED** in 1985's Super Mario Bros., Princess Peach's rise to superstardom wouldn't begin until around three years later, with the release of its sequel, Super Mario Bros. 2.

What likely began as a simple way to round out the cast of four playable characters — being carried over from Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic for a Western release by utilizing the only other two good guys from the preceding title — would pave the way for Peach's place in the Mario universe for years to come. At least, in the Western hemisphere.

Her place in the second Super Mario Bros. adventure changed up her appearance a bit, swapping out the crimson head of hair she had sported previously for a brunette color, while her white gown was replaced by a pink dress that would be more familiar to fans of Peach today. Interestingly, these colors match the pixel art of her DDP counterpart, Lina, almost exactly, save for lightening up the black into brown. She would be the only character of the quartet to resemble her counterpart in just such a way.

Oh, and we would be remiss if we didn't mention that as a result of the DDP mechanics, Peach would be gifted with the ability to hover briefly after jumping — an ability which instantly made her a fan favorite then (even despite Luigi's overall superior jumping ability), and is still closely associated with the character today, particularly in Super Smash Bros.

Her role in Super Mario Bros. 2 would also go on to inform her appearances in other media, such as The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!, where she joined with the Mario Bros. and Toad on their quest to topple the evil King Koopa, a version of Bowser with an extreme cosplay obsession and an iron grip on the many bizarre lands which comprised the Mushroom Kingdom. There, she was every bit a member of the group as the fourth Ninja Turtle or the Pink Ranger are in theirs.

She also featured prominently throughout the Super Mario Bros. line of comic books under Valiant's Nintendo Comics System brand, though her hair (and oddly, her eyes) had more of an orange color to them. The more fiery color was perhaps more suitable for the persnickety personality they gave her, as there would be an effort made here to give her a bit more of a spunky edge than we would come to see from her in later years.

In The Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3, she shocked everyone — viewers included — when she appeared ready for a concert with her friends. However, while Toad was expecting something more along the lines of a symphony (and had the Bros. dress accordingly, much to their chagrin), it turned out that she was decked out in torn pink pants, boots and a band shirt to see her favorite music group: Milli Vanilli. (And in case you were wondering: No, that episode did *not* age particularly well. Why do you ask?)

Perhaps this all spawned from the ending of the game that was the new hotness at the time of both that cartoon and comic's arrival: Super Mario Bros. 3, of course. Presented with pixel art very similar to her SMB2 appearance, she teased the player upon their defeat of Bowser at the end of World 8 by saying, "Thank you. But our Princess is in another castle! . . . Just kidding! Ha ha ha!"

Players who'd just barely survived the final fight were not so amused. **— DAVID**

# THE BLONDE BABY DOLL

**"DEAR MARIO,** please come to the castle. I've baked a cake for you. Yours truly, Princess Toadstool. Peach!"

Those words are ingrained in the memories of all who played Super Mario 64 and asked the question . . . "Peach?!" Why did she say *Peach?* Is that a nickname? Is that her FIRST name? Then when Mario Kart 64 was released she was simply "Peach," and then again in Mario Party. A shift had occurred. It was hard to wrap my head around, especially after years of hearing her referred to only as Princess Toadstool in The Super Mario Bros. Super Show and its sequel seasons.

Graphically, she finally started to look more like the Super Mario Bros. 2 NES manual art had suggested in SNES games like Super Mario World and Super Mario RPG: blonde hair, pink dress, brooch, earrings and crown. Again, her cartoon form was more prominent in my mind personally, and that aligned more with her SMB2 sprite appearance, but in the art she was always different. She also got quite a height boost! She often appeared smaller than Super Mario in the NES games outside of SMB2, but she was seen as being taller than Luigi at the end of Super Mario World. Her Mario RPG look was sort of a chibi-stylized version, so Super Mario 64 really cemented her stats moving forward.

After the dawn of the Internet, outside of this era, the rest of the world learned that for Japanese players it was only ever a graphical shift, as there her name was Princess Peach all along! It was changed to Toadstool in other regions to stay on theme with "Mushroom Kingdom." By then, everyone had accepted the change, and it was more of an interesting factoid than a paradigm shift.

While her look and name were being solidified, another much more important shift was happening: In this era she slowly emerged from her damsel-in-distress role into actually having a personality – and a voice! Leslie Swan took the voice role for this era, defining her super sweet high-pitched voice.

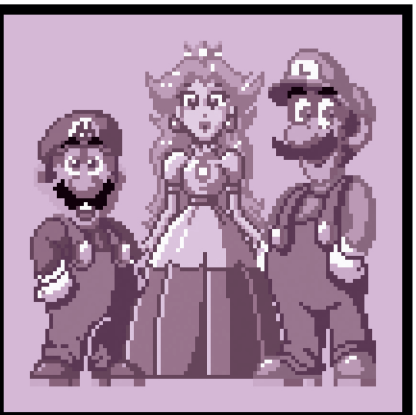
Before she was voiced audibly, she was given lines in Super Mario RPG. These displayed a range of emotion, but rarely broke her decorum as a respected princess, even given the bizarre circumstances . . . and Booster. While she showed she was no pushover in SMB2, she wielded a parasol and a frying pan in this game to really bang home that she was not to be trifled with (not that it ever stopped Bowser).

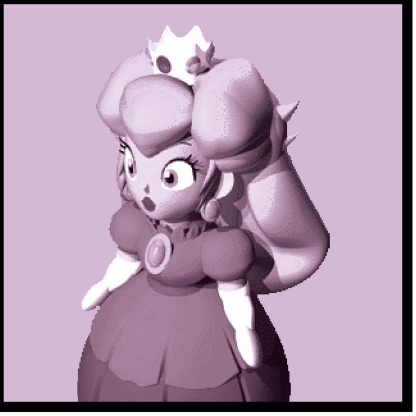
She was given more and more screen time and became a staple part of the playable crew. Having her drift around corners and chuck bananas and shells in Super Mario Kart and again in its sequel had us all thinking of her differently – and for the better! She was finally having fun and presented as something more than a final goalpost.

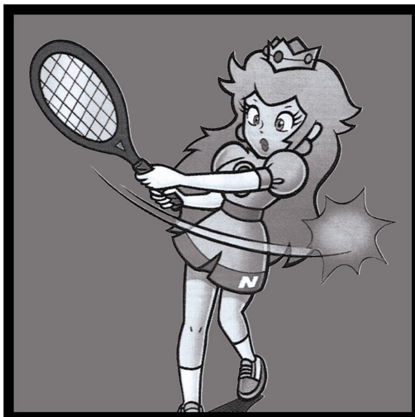
Maybe that's why it was so disappointing to see her role once again reverted to helpless victim for the New Super Mario Bros. games. At least she had a better kidnapping story in Super Mario 64!

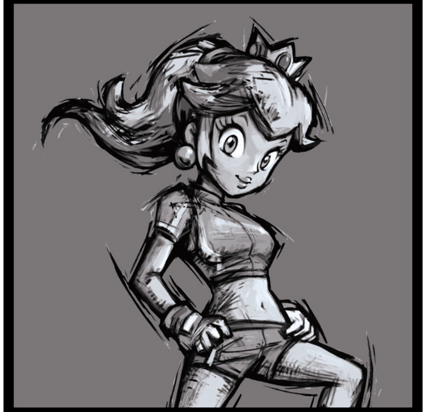
We saw even more of her personality in Paper Mario, as she often had control of the story with her pal Twink. She was painted as mischievous, not one to take a kidnapping sitting down, and always with a focus to help others in her kingdom.

This era largely defined the Peach we know and love today: a Kewpie baby doll appearance masking a strong and formidable ruler of Toads. Still, she knows how to have fun! . . . And where is fun always found? Why, on the court/field/other sporting arenas! Her next era was drawing near . . . **— BRETT**









# SPORTY SURPRISE

**LIKE MANY MONARCHS,** Peach lives to serve her people. Sometimes literally! Starting with Mario Tennis for Virtual Boy, the plucky princess publicly pursued power serves on a whole new kind of court: the tennis court. By doffing her regal and elegant (but unwieldy and cumbersome) full-length gown and donning a freeing mini-skirt, Peach signaled to her followers that, though she may play a poised and reserved ruler when that's what's called for, she can also get aggressive and assertive when the game changes from politics to competitive sports. Unfortunately, almost no one experienced her initial outing as a playable tennis competitor, as the Virtual Boy sold terribly and was dead within a year of launch.

But as history has shown, you can't keep a good Peach down. Five years later, Peach returned to the racket with Mario Tennis on the N64, and she hasn't turned back since. This was also the first time she teamed up with Daisy, the presiding princess of the neighboring kingdom of Sarasaland, and a ruddy-faced ruler who sported the same brunette look that Peach was rocking in her Mario 2 days! Daisy's personality also drew upon Peach's prior brash and sassy ways, to the point where some have mistaken Peach in her classic Milli Vanilli sweatshirt for her brown-haired companion. But that overlap in style didn't stop the two princesses from becoming lifelong doubles partners and permanent gal pals.

Maybe Daisy's more rebellious attitude rubbed off on Peach a little, as the mushroom maiden's future forays through her sporting life came with even more brazen choices. She'd later hit the the baseball diamond, the golf course and even the soccer field, not to mention a number of side competitions like ice hockey and lumberjacking, often with outfit changes to match. Her most shocking ensemble was her heavily armored soccer attire, which came with paradoxically revealing low-cut shorts and a bellybutton-exposing tank top. The once demure lady was getting downright racy!

Speaking of races, her skintight motorcycle outfit seen in Mario Kart Wii was also a head-turner. But just because Peach was more willing to push boundaries by wearing pants in a game didn't mean she couldn't return to her royal regalia when the time was right. While she may have been tempted to dress up as a giant domino-style tile during her turn as a competitive Mahjong player in 2005's Yakuman DS, she instead showed classy restraint by sticking to her standard formalwear.

All of these talents eventually culminated in the ultimate athletic achievement: vying for Olympic gold! Not bad for a previously unassuming head of state! And in typical princess style, she took the world games spotlight as an opportunity to try some all-new attire! While on horseback, she looked beyond sharp in a traditional red riding jacket, while rhythm gymnastics called for a leggy leotard that really knocked 'em dead. She'd also go on to slay in a judogi, fully protective fencing gear, climbing shorts and a surfer's wetsuit.

Peach's decision to go pro athlete had broadened her horizons and taken her to new heights. The possibilities for where to go next were endless! **— JONATHAN**

# QUEEN OF CROSSOVERS

**SHORTLY AFTER TAKING** up the tennis racket on the N64, Peach embarked on a series of competitive crossovers that not only bent the rules of ladylike behavior, but also the laws of space and time themselves!

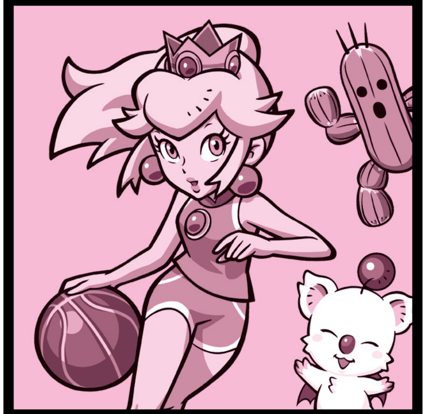
In 2001, she struck out as a professional fighter for the first time in Super Smash Bros. Melee, joining Samus and Zelda (and some would say Jigglypuff) to make a handful of women on the 25-slot roster. Punching Pokémon, kicking a Kong and flinging Fire Emblem heroes to their doom? That's not something anyone expected to see from the largely peaceful princess. But that was just the start of how Peach's appearance in Melee played against type. In a move people are still talking about today, the ruler of the Mushroom Kingdom pulled out a Toad and used him as a "human" shield. Like most strokes of comic genius, this blatant disregard for the well-being of her subjects was both totally unexpected and exactly what cynical folks would imagine a highfalutin head of state might do. In some ways, this was the most "realistic" depiction of the princess to date, as it ironically and self-knowingly played into our negative expectations of the upper class.

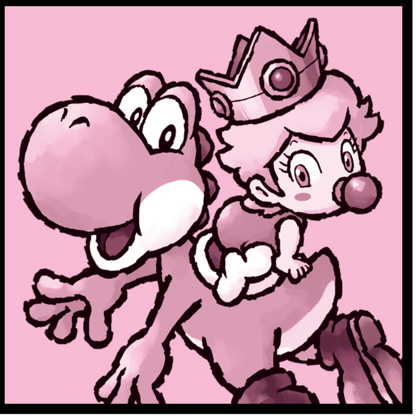
Then in a complete U-turn, Peach got down and dirty on Earth's urban basketball courts with NBA Street V3. Squaring up against real-life celebrities like Lebron James, Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O'Neil, Magic Johnson and even the Beastie Boys, our B-balling beauty (and the Mario Bros.) headed off to Chicago, Pittsburgh and New York City to trade dribbles and dunks in reality-bending battles of 3-on-3 roundball. Also in a deal with EA, Peach and her two Italian pals hit the slopes in SSX on Tour, the fourth game in the skiing and snowboarding franchise. While they didn't race against any real athletes in that one, they were definitely not in the Mushroom Kingdom anymore, and all their opponents were carefully designed to look like real-world humans, making Peach and her melon-headed, cartoon-faced companions stand out in a bold and unabashedly playful way.

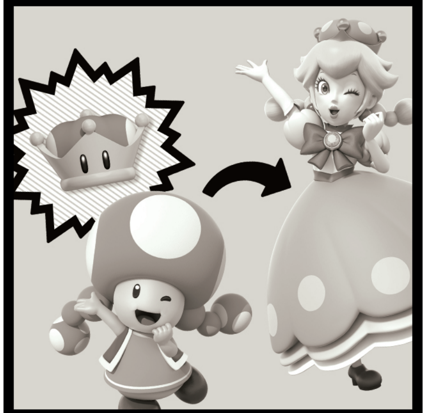
Peach's multiverse-hopping adventures continued in not one but two basketball titles that pitted her against Final Fantasy characters. She also joined Team Mario in a financial conflict with various Dragon Quest celebrities in Fortune Street, a virtual board game that plays like a hyper-complicated digital evolution of Monopoly. Ruthlessly charging rent to Slimes and Platypunks to get rich at their expense was right in line with Peach's burgeoning image as a sweet-faced but formidable opponent. Between an explosive King of the Hill fighting tournament, dabbling in extreme sports and mastering ruthless real estate ventures, she had defied her childlike reputation in more ways than one.

Until, that is, she decided to go the other direction and lean all the way into her baby face. Literally! With Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time, Mario Kart: Double Dash!! and Yoshi's Island DS, Peach debuted her full infant form, aptly named Baby Peach, for the very first time. In that last game, she even became a playable partner for Yoshi, just as Baby Mario had before her. And of course, this was also the era where she headlined her own Yoshi's Island-esque 2D platformer, entitled Super Princess Peach, detailed in this very issue's Retro section.

With so many crossovers, playable roles and opportunities to defy expectations, Peach's future had never been so bright. And as we'd soon come to see, the leading parts for the Princess would keep getting bigger and better! **— JONATHAN**







# THE AGE OF IDENTITY THIEVES

**SINCE THE STANDARDIZATION** of Mario series lore across all regions, Peach has been characterized as a posh and proper sovereign, with a dash of feistiness and a healthy competitive streak. The "ideal gentlewoman," as it were. While not the worst role model for impressionable adolescents, neither could she be described as "multidimensional."

Who was the woman behind the mask? And when would Nintendo allow us to take a peek? Ironically, it's only once Peach became a figurative mask for other characters to wear that the depths of her character began to bubble up.

We got our first taste of an alt-Princess back during Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door's climax, when she served as a vessel for the Shadow Queen and donned some tastefully villainous purple regalia. The first item on her evil agenda? Disintegrate the previous Big Bad for daring to challenge her authority! Sure, Peach's consciousness may not have been at the wheel, but the pairing of such vicious brutality and an angelic countenance seemed . . . oddly fitting?

Then in the Wii U port of Bayonetta, the Umbra Witch's wardrobe expanded to include outfits based on several Nintendo icons, such as Peach's gown, albeit with some **ahem** bawdy alterations. The Mario franchise's family-friendly disposition had never prevented a segment of the male demographic from fawning over the fair-skinned lass — and now here was a Nintendo-endorsed appeal to those very hormonal proclivities?

The uber-popular Minecraft also got in on the action with the Super Mario Mash-Up Pack, which included Mario-themed skins for Steve and company. Not only was a Peach texture among the skins, so too was Cat Peach, allowing denizens of the voxel sandbox paradise to cosplay a royal cosplaying as a furry! And when Toadette joined the roster in New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe, she was bestowed a unique Super Crown power-up that likewise allowed her to cosplay as the monarch she admired!

Of course, you can't mention the Peachette transformation without acknowledging the social media sensation Bowsette, the fan-conceived result of Bowser's sudden possession of the Super Crown. As comfortable as the Koopa King seems to be reborn as a Koopa *Queen*, it makes you wonder if his obsession with Peach is less about unrequited love and more about a vicarious lifestyle desire. Furthermore, if a power-up could transform anyone into the spitting image of Peach, could that also mean that Peach herself may in fact be a hitherto unknown face, reflecting the beauty they see inside themself?

Perhaps there's no more unusual a costumed Peach personality than Rabbid Peach from Mario + Rabbids: Kingdom Battle. While the other Rabbid facsimiles are unequivocal caricatures of the regular Mario cast, Rabbid Peach is at ludicrous odds with her counterpart — she's vain, bossy, addicted to social media and cloaked in teenage ennui. The only quality she seemingly shares with the real deal is their love for a certain mustachioed do-gooder. That is . . . unless . . . what she mirrors is not the Princess as she *is* but as she once *was*, a stubborn child resisting the station she would one day inherit. Maybe this is the *real* Princess beneath the pomp and pageantry, the id without the superego to keep it in check!

Nintendo thought that by turning the *concept* of Peach into an aesthetic, they could avoid any proper exploration of her psyche. Little did they realize that some surface-level literary analysis would be their undoing! And with nothing left to hide, they're now forced to write a brand-new chapter in our leading lady's ongoing saga! **— TONY**

# FULL-RANGE MOVIE FACE

**THERE COMES A** profound moment following the daring lunar escape in Super Mario Odyssey when both Mario and Bowser, in a fit of aggressive male chauvinism, thrust flowers in Peach's face and compel her to settle on a lifelong romantic partner once and for all. Exhausted and exasperated by the game's events, she brusquely counters their ultimatum with a fiery gaze that brings the man-children to tears.

"How dare they treat me as a prize," she must've mused. "But then again, who exactly am I without them?"

So like a fresh college grad spending a year abroad before tackling the rat race back home, Peach embarked on a globe-trotting journey of self-discovery. While basking in the monuments she had no opportunity to appreciate during captivity, I can only imagine she looked back at her tumultuous life up until that point — the tired damsel-in-distress routine, the brief period when she joined the Mario Bros. and Toad on their quest through Subcon, the liberation she felt on the court and the go-kart track and her . . . err . . . brunette phase.

Well, she did manage to reform the SMB2 squad for Super Mario 3D World, and even bring new gal pal Rosalina into the mix. That was exciting! But to fall right back into Bowser's clutches in later episodes? Time really *is* a flat circle!

No more! She had to evolve! She had so much to offer, so much . . . passion, drama, glamor . . . yes, that's it! She was born to dazzle on both screen and stage!

The Super Mario Bros. Movie from Illumination was the perfect avenue to showcase Peach's expansive range. She was sharp, witty, adventurous, ambitious and not afraid to get her hands dirty! Instead of the demure voice she possessed in the games, she spoke in a commanding tone, provided by the equally talented Anya Taylor-Joy, to emphasize her role as leader of the Mushroom Kingdom. Why, we hadn't seen the Princess act with such dominance since 1992's Super Mario Adventures comic from Nintendo Power! It was a mistake for Nintendo to put that particular genie back in the bottle, but now that she's out again, she shall be bound nevermore!

Thus we arrive on the eve of Princess Peach: Showtime!, a new solo extravaganza that promises to give Peach the full Barbie treatment — a cavalcade of wild careers and personas, plus the skills to perform all those roles to absolute perfection! However, the title's initial reveal was lacking the requisite oomph that a lady of Peach's magnificence deserved. What could be missing? The answer arrived in mid-October 2023, when the game's key art was updated to feature the Peach model from the recent billion-dollar blockbuster. That porcelain doll facial structure of her previous incarnations was simply not adequate to convey the subtleties of her more nuanced expressions!

In fairness, her in-game model is still relatively unchanged from the one featured throughout the past two decades. I'd just chalk that up to the inadequacies of the aging Switch hardware, though. If the power was there — or rather, *when* the power is there in the not-so-distant future — I guarantee Nintendo would ensure Peach channels that Taylor-Joy energy in every appearance going forward! Still, that shouldn't detract from this grand opportunity to show the world that our favorite Princess is her own dynamic hero, untethered from the likes of Italian plumbers and magic talking turtles.

Behold, the rebirth of a superstar! Witness her, and consider yourselves blessed to be in her presence! **— TONY**

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

# PRINCESS PEACH: SHOWTIME!

## The Mushroom Kingdom's monarch is set to take center stage!

**THE MARIO SERIES** is an incubator for spin-offs. So many different characters got their start starring alongside Super Mario in one (or several) of his many adventures, and they've since gone on to become headlining stars of their own.

Take his little brother Luigi — he began as nothing more than a palette swap of big bro Mario over 40 years ago, but he found his own fans and established his own identity over time. Nintendo entrusted him to carry the GameCube launch by his lonesome with Luigi's Mansion, and that title has gone on to inspire two different sequels, an arcade game and a pair of ports (the second of which is bound for the Switch later this year). Luigi has become a solo series star.

How about Yoshi? The ever-hungry dino pal started getting his own games almost immediately after he was first introduced in Super Mario World, over 30 years ago. Yoshi's Cookie, Yoshi's Island, Yoshi's Woolly World, Yoshi's *Crafted* World . . . he got more than one of his own Worlds! (And at least three Islands.) He's doing very well for himself after first letting Mario ride him around like a horse in '91.

Captain Toad? Sure! Even that guy, once just a one-off cameo character, got his own game. And it's since been released in three different versions! Treasure Tracker isn't exactly a *series* like the others, but still.

In fact, if you really want to count spin-offs under the Mario umbrella, you should count all of Mario's own games too — since he himself spun off his own adventures from the Donkey Kong franchise! (Making D.K. the real paterfamilias here.)

All of this is to say that I'm surprised it's taken this long for Nintendo to give Princess Peach another chance at spin-off stardom. She had Super Princess Peach on the DS 18 years ago — I'm not ignoring that one, and we'll give it a full retrospective later in this issue. But Peach could've carried so much more by now. It's about time!

### A MULTIFACETED MONARCH

I suppose it's taken Nintendo so long to push Princess Peach back into the limelight because they simply didn't have the right gameplay concept for her until now. They're a famously gameplay-first company — they'll come up with a fun idea or a unique control scheme, something solid enough to build a whole game around, and only then will they decide which if any of their existing characters is a match for it. Peach finally got the call back to action for Showtime! since its core gameplay seemed to suit her best!

. . . Which is funny, since the core gameplay in Showtime! is a whole big mixture of a bunch of different ideas and control schemes. It's a variety show! It's a dozen different games in one, each one trading off for the next in line before it wears out its welcome. You won't ever have time to get bored of what you're doing in this game, because what you're doing will change every time Peach changes costumes!

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: MARCH 22, 2024 RATING: E

*SHE'S READY TO BREAK A LEG!*

## PRINCESS PEACH

After playing a supporting role in nearly every one of her previous video game appearances going all the way back to 1985, Princess Peach is at long last getting another chance to take top billing in a brand-new adventure that's all her own. From what we've seen so far, it seems like Mario, Bowser and all of the rest of her common co-stars will play no role in Princess Peach: Showtime!, as it's her name that's lit up on the marquee – and nobody's going to upstage her this time!

The theater/stage play theming of this adventure is a bit of a callback to her past, though. The first time Peach was playable, in Super Mario Bros. 2, the character select screen was presented like a stage, with red curtains around it! Likewise, when she was rescued in Super Mario Bros. 3, a curtain dropped to end that adventure. All these games really being performances put on by actors has been a theory ever since the '80s!

Swordfighter Peach. Dashing Thief Peach. Kung Fu Peach and Cowgirl Peach and Ninja Peach . . . Peaches, Peaches, Peaches!

Every alter ego alters the style of play in Princess Peach: Showtime!, because every alter ego is the leading role in a different, uh, style of play. Stage plays! Musicals, even!

But, we've gotten ahead of ourselves. Let's go back and set the stage properly, shall we?

### AN EVENING AT THE THEATER

Princess Peach: Showtime! begins when a Toad finds a flyer advertising the brilliant, shining Sparkle Theater and shows it to our leading lady. She think it looks incredible and decides to attend a show there, taking two Toads along too. They arrive safely and enter the building, but even before they're able to leave the lobby and find their seats, a swirl of sinister magic appears – and a villainous witch named Grape enters the scene! Casting a spell over the entire theater, Grape takes control of the property. Furthermore, she summons forth a force of enforcers! The Sour Bunch, a whole bushel full of different grape-headed hoodlums with acidic attitudes.

As the only hero on the scene (the two Toads who tagged along are the cowardly type), Princess Peach is called upon to step up, squish this bunch of sour grapes and restore the theater to its former shining glory. Luckily, she doesn't have to perform this role solo!

### HEY, STELLAAAAAAAAA!

The Sparkle Theater is blessed to have a guardian fairy. Her name is Stella, and she's a cheerful, star-headed hovering companion who powers up Princess Peach for this new adventure.

Grape the Witch blew Peach's traditional crown away during her initial magical attack, so Stella helps her get her hair fixed back up with a stylish new ribbon. In fact, it seems Stella kind of *is* the ribbon – and she's not just for looks! Kind of like the Baby Luma who lived under Mario's hat in the Super Mario Galaxy games and granted him the Spin maneuver while it was present there, Princess Peach gets access to some all-new ribbon-twirling attacks while partnered up with Stella. She can spin a ribbon around her in a circle (like on our cover this time), or in front of her (like in the screenshot below).

Stella's natural goodness and cheer affect all things she touches, so when Peach hits a Sour Bunch baddie with her ribbon, that baddie immediately loses their bad attitude and exits the scene. (Peach doesn't seem to *defeat* enemies so much as just convince them to stop throwing a tantrum and go back home.) Twirling the ribbon to hit part of the environment also works to remove Grape's curse from that bit of the theater, which visually brightens the space but can also reveal collectables like Sparkle Gems. There are 10 of those hidden in each level, and many of them will take careful exploration to discover!

### THE STARS OF THE SHOW

Now, let's return to the closet full of different costumes. All of the ribbon-twirling gameplay is really just the opening act in each level, as eventually Peach and Stella will come across a platform upon which Peach can stand to undergo an on-the-spot magical transformation! She'll swap her clothes and her attitude to match the current play she's in (the Sparkle Theater has dozens going on at once, apparently, and Peach will visit each of them in turn), and when she's suited up as a superhero or an ice skater or a detective, the game's gameplay will totally change. Let's see the list next!

*EN GARDE!*

## SWORDFIGHTER PEACH

Doing her best impression of The Three Musketeers, Swordfighter Peach takes up a shining rapier and prepares to puncture all who oppose her! She can slash and stab in this form, but her real skill may lie in her defense, rather than her offense: When an enemy's attack is incoming, Swordfighter Peach can deftly dodge, sidestep or otherwise avoid the assault with some incredible time-slowing agility!

*FISTS & FEET OF FURY*

## KUNG FU PEACH

I've seen martial arts *movies* plenty of times, but I don't think I've ever watched a martials arts play! The Sparkle Theater really has it all! As Kung Fu Peach, our star performer will unleash powerful punches and kicks to beat her enemies into submission. (So much for gently twirling ribbons at them, I guess.) Fast action and quick platforming will come into play in Kung Fu Peach scenes!

*PRIVATE EYE PRINCESS*

## DETECTIVE PEACH

Pikachu isn't the only major Nintendo mascot who sometimes moonlights as a crime-solving sleuth! Detective Peach dons her own Sherlock Holmes-esque deerstalker cap and sets out to solve the mysteries of the Theater. She'll interview witnesses to crimes in order to track down their culprits, and also follow trails of footsteps with the help of her handy magnifying glass. The game is afoot!

*GIVING JUST DESSERTS*

## PATISSIERE PEACH

Here's your vocabulary lesson of the day: a patissiere is a pastry chef! (Specifically a female pastry chef, as the male term is patissier, without the final "e.") In this form, Peach will mix up Showtime!'s pace of play by playing what is essentially a set of Mario Party minigames. She'll have to beat the clock to bake huge confections like the enormous cake seen below. (Who exactly is going to eat all of that!?)

*THE SILENT ASSASSIN*

## NINJA PEACH

Ninja Peach is the transformation I'm most looking forward to, because there's just so much going on with it! She will employ stealth techniques to sneak up on her foes, like hiding in tall grass and using a reed to breathe underwater. She'll use twin kunai to strike from the shadows. She'll wall-jump, wall-run and then hide again, pressed up against a wall, holding up an invisibility cloak! Scenes starring Ninja Peach are sure to be a blast to play.

*ROPIN' & RIDIN'*

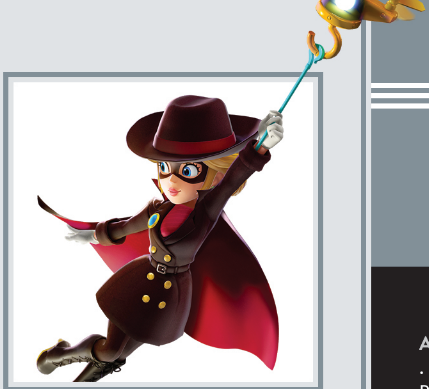
## COWGIRL PEACH

Well yeehaw, pardner! I don't suppose you could have any real fun in a variety show kind of video game without heading to the Old West once or twice! Cowgirl Peach will saddle up her horse and ride in hot pursuit of those no-good Sour Bunch varmints, then throw a lasso 'round 'em to bring 'em to justice. She'll also rope up some barrels and then chuck those just as well as Donkey Kong ever did! Tarnation!

*PART OF YOUR WORLD*

## MERMAID PEACH

Disney might have a legal case against Nintendo for this one, as this is pretty clearly not just Mermaid Peach, but The Little Mermaid Peach, since she sings songs just like Ariel! (I'm sure there's a Lawyer Peach if litigation really begins.) Swim your way through underwater areas and influence the environment around you by belting out show-stopping tunes. I knew there'd be a musical in this mix!



*COOL CAT BURGLAR*

## DASHING THIEF PEACH

Adopting an identity that's some kind of cross between Batman, Carmen Sandiego and Joker from Persona 5, Peach in her Dashing Thief disguise will be one smooth criminal. She'll stalk through the shadows and evade detection on her nighttime crime sprees, then flee the scene with skillful use of a grappling hook. She'll even take to the skies with a hang glider for extended getaway sequences!

*SHOCKING SUPERHERO*

## MIGHTY PEACH

If she's going to have a look that's kinda/sorta like Batman, then she also needs one that's like Superman too, huh? Mighty Peach is a superhero with super strength, able to lift and toss huge objects and vehicles. She punches with power, has lightning flying out of her firsts and she can even fly, with scenes in the sky that play out like classic auto-scrolling shooter games. "It's a bird!" "It's a plane!" "No, it's Mighty Peach!"

*ELEGANCE & GRACE*

## FIGURE SKATER PEACH

"Let it go! Let it gooo!" Peach may or may not start singing big ballads in this form (that's what Mermaid Peach is for), but in her Figure Skater costume she'll at least look a lot like Elsa from Frozen! Ice skating in smooth lines and circles, she'll spin her enemies up until they're dizzy – and surely impress the judges while doing so! (She's skated in the Winter Olympics several times before this, you know.)

**A CUTIE CHARCUTERIE**

. . . And we're back. So, which of these 10 different Peach transformations are you most excited to try? Ninja Peach gets the nod from me, but Dashing Thief Peach is a close second. I also have high hopes for Detective Peach, especially since I was disappointed by Detective Pikachu Returns a few months ago – maybe playing a private eye will feel more fun when it's just one piece of a much larger and more varied package, and it's not trying to shoulder the weight of the whole game all by itself.

And I think that's going to be a real strength of Princess Peach: Showtime! There are so many different facets to this game design, and so many different things to do, that even if one of the Peach alter egos doesn't click with you, it shouldn't tank the whole experience. Everyone will find a favorite of their own, then maybe just cruise through the ones that don't end up feeling quite as appealing.

It's like getting a box of chocolates! Everybody knows there will be one or two in the mix that aren't quite to their taste, but nobody's turning down the box entirely. On the whole, the variety is going to bring more joy than disgust.

**MEET THE THEETS**

One more quick section before we close the curtain on this preview. You see those little bulb-nosed fellas in a few of the screenshots? Those are the Theets, the workers and performers of the Sparkle Theater. They need Peach to rescue them – and their jobs! They're just so cute, too! OK, wrapping up now . . .

**SETTING UP AN ENCORE PERFORMANCE?**

Princess Peach: Showtime! has all the markings of a one-off adventure, because it's a bit hard to picture a straightforward sequel. I suppose a hypothetical Showtime! 2 could just have a whole new set of transformations for Peach to make it feel unique and new, but they're covering a lot of bases with just the 10 we've seen so far, and there are very likely more costumes to be worn in the game that Nintendo is not revealing before release.

I wonder instead if featuring all these different Peachs might be a way for Nintendo to test the waters with every one of them. Maybe audiences will really end up loving one of these styles of gameplay in particular, and then the follow-up to Showtime! ends up being something like "Ninja Peach Gaiden" that goes all-in on expanding the ninja gameplay, or "Kung Fu Peach: Beat-'em-Up Battle Brawl" that extends that kind of combat into an entire adventure.

Or maybe none of that happens, and Princess Peach: Showtime! gets no follow-up at all, and we have to wait another 18 years before the next new spin-off starring her is approved!

I truly hope that's not the case. Princess Peach deserves not only this one new chance to shine, but to have the opportunity to carry her own ongoing series, as Luigi and Yoshi have done.

If you too would like to live in that reality in the future, then be sure you support Showtime! when it goes on sale on March 22. Show Nintendo that their audience is ready to show up for the Princess as a solo superstar, and not just when she's attached to Super Mario! **— LUCAS**

# SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA RUMBLE

## Monkey-rolling madness meets maddening online multiplayer!

**FIRST, THERE WAS** Banana Blitz HD. And it was good.

However, the original wasn't really among the top tier of Super Monkey Ball games to begin with, so fans weren't exactly thrilled. But, it did well enough to warrant more.

Then came Banana Mania, which borrowed/remade material from the original games that put the Monkey Ball games on the map. That sold quite a bit better.

And yet, the people were still not quite satisfied. "When," they asked, "are we going to get a *new* Monkey Ball game?!"

Those questions were answered by Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio in the February 2024 Nintendo Direct: Partner Showcase, when it was revealed that Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble will be coming to the Nintendo Switch in June.

A new Adventure Mode is just the start of this rumble above the jungle, as 200 all-new stages await you and your choice of several customizable monkey maniacs. If you're not one for riding solo, then you're in luck, as this mode supports four-player co-op multiplayer monkey mayhem in online *and* offline modes! In the latter case, you'll only need one console, thanks to good old split-screen technology.

Other game modes include "Race," where the object is to race (obviously) through gimmick-filled courses to reach the goal before your opponents, "Banana Hunt," which tasks players with gathering the most bananas to triumph, and "Robot Smash," which pits monkey against machine with the goal of working together with a team to bash the most bots.

But what *really* puts the "rumble" in "Banana Rumble" is the new online Battle Mode, where 16 primate players face off in a war for simian supremacy. Perhaps the brand-new "Spin Dash" maneuver will be just the thing to turn the tide in your favor, as you can use it to not only find new routes and blast past the competition, but also send your foes flying!

Wait, "Spin Dash?" Huh, why does that sound familiar . . . ? Ah, well, I'm sure no one else is using it. Least of all anyone from Sega, right? In any case, it sounds like just the thing for Monkey Ballers who've gotta go fast!

While six playable characters are returning from past games, a new, seventh member is being added to the cast: Palette! (That's her at the bottom of this page.) A further six characters from iconic Sega franchises will be available to those who opt for the Sega Pass DLC pack (included in the Digital Deluxe Edition, as well as separately), along with Sega-themed customization options you can add to the 300+ already included in the game.

Those who go physical with their copies will instead receive an O-Sleeve slipcover for the package, a reversible cover and a 40-page physical art book. And everyone who pre-orders will receive an exclusive Banana Suit digital costume! **— DAVID**

**SWITCH** PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVLOPER: RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO
RELEASE: JUNE 25, 2024 RATING: E

# MONSTER HUNTER STORIES

## The original 3DS game gets spruced up for Switch.

**IT'S TIME TO** "Ride On" once again on the Switch!

Monster Hunter Stories, the first game in this delightful MonHun spin-off series from Capcom, will receive a remaster and release on Switch, PC and PlayStation 4 this Summer. It originally released on 3DS in 2017.

Monster Hunter Stories focuses on the dynamic between Monster Riders and their Monsties, rather than actual monster hunting. Your customizable protagonist can fight alongside Monsties in Rock/Paper/Scissors-style turn-based combat, use them to explore a vast world and also hatch eggs to build up a solid team.

This remaster will include HD graphics, voiceover in both English and Japanese, additional language support, a museum mode featuring music and sketches from developers, and title updates that were only available in Japan previously.

It looks like it'll resemble its sequel, Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin, quite a bit. (Wings of Ruin debuted on Switch in 2021.) From its announcement trailer, the remaster not only showcases similar visuals, but it sounds like some voice actors will also reprise their roles — like Navirou, your trusted Felyne sidekick.

Wings of Ruin holds a special place in my heart for being the first MonHun game that I really clicked with. The simple-yet-fun systems, colorful cartoonish style and wholesome bonds forged between Rider and Monstie hooked me. I gave it a 9 out of 10, and now I can't wait to see how the series first got started! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: CAPCOM DEVELOPERS: CAPCOM & MARVELOUS RELEASE: SUMMER 2024 RATING: E10+

# SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V: VENGEANCE

## A new journey awaits the Nahobino.

**IT'S PRETTY MUCH** Atlus tradition at this point to re-release expanded versions of their games a few years after they first hit store shelves. The latest game receiving this treatment is Shin Megami Tensei V, which initially came out in 2021 as a Switch exclusive.

The enhanced version of this RPG, now subtitled "Vengeance," looks to expand on all horizons, from platforms to a new story route. In addition to Switch, it will release on PC, PlayStation and Xbox platforms on June 21.

The game's new features feel like an amalgamation of ideas we've seen in Persona 5 Royal and Fire Emblem: Three Houses. Much like Royal, SMT V: Vengeance will have new QoL features like skippable cutscenes, being able to save anywhere and mini-map rotation; it will also include a new heroine who plays a major role in the new story content.

Its story comprises the original game's story route, now dubbed Canon of Creation, and a new route, Canon of Vengeance. The new route follows the original game's story up to a certain point and then deviates, much like how Three Houses tailored its narrative.

If you're unfamiliar with the SMT series, its key elements include large environments to explore, a focus on collecting demons and then fusing those demons, and the Press-Turn battle system, where you and the enemies you face gain turns by hitting weaknesses.

SMT V: Vengeance looks to enhance the original game's experience in meaningful ways, so if you skipped SMT V, this June might be the time to play. Though this strategy always makes me question if it's worth buying Atlus games when they initially come out in the first place . . . **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: ATLUS RELEASE: JUNE 21, 2024 RATING: M

# SAGA: EMERALD BEYOND

## The Final Fantasy Legend lives on, three and half decades later!

**VERDANT WAVES WILL** light your way in the latest entry of Square Enix's SaGa series, and with six protagonists and 17 different worlds, there will be no shortage of paths to take in SaGa: Emerald Beyond.

If you're new to the SaGa series, you can expect turn-based combat, multiple perspectives from different protagonists and a non-linear story via the Freeform Scenario System.

This feature allows players to shape their own story by making choices and unlocking new possibilities. It also allows for multiple playthroughs to see everything the game has in store.

While Emerald Beyond retains mechanics from previous SaGa games, it will provide a standalone adventure, so playing other games is not required reading for this one.

Emerald Beyond takes place among 17 different worlds, each with their own history, culture and issues. Using a hub called the Beyond, players can employ a phenomenon called Emerald Waves to traverse to and from these settings.

The interesting thing is that these worlds are not aware of each other, so there's bound to be some conflict and confusion as the story progresses!

The Emerald Waves manifest as swirling lines of light; they show what paths you can take safely and where you might find a fight awaiting. For example, if the line forming in one direction is red, then danger is ahead.

If you do choose to face the conflict, SaGa's turn-based combat system, which flows on a timeline, comes into play. SaGa's combat features several key mechanics.

The Glimmer system provides skills to your party at random; Formations allow you to customize party member positions, and you can chain skills together to create powerful United Attacks. All of this plus keeping a careful eye on the timeline of turn orders is required for success.

One of the first choices you'll have to make in Emerald Beyond is the perspective in which you'll experience the story. The game has six protagonists (though two of them make up a duo), and they all have the ability to see the Emerald Waves.

Here's a bit about each option:

**Tsunanori Mido:** A man from a distinguished family who can control animated puppets called kugutsu. He sets off on a journey to other worlds to help his hometown of Miyako City, which has been beset by supernatural phenomena.

**Ameya Aisling:** A witch in training from Witchdom Pulchra, Ameya disguises herself as a schoolgirl in Miyako City. She loses most of her magic after an attack and must figure out how to get it back, so she can finish her training.

**Siugnas:** A vampire king who rules the dark world of Yomi. After he's betrayed, Siugnas wakes up in Brighthome, the land of the dead, and fights alongside an army against invading forces. He resolves to regain his powers.

**Diva No. 5:** Once a captivating entertainer in the world of Avalon, Diva No. 5, a songstress mech, loses her voice and her memory all at once. And so, she forges a new path with the Society for the Exploration of Other Worlds.

**Bonnie Blair** & **Formina Franklyn:** Bonnie is former military, and Formina is a famous sharpshooter. Together, they make up a rookie detective duo and begin working on an investigation into the assassination of the President of Capitol City.

With so many worlds to explore and different perspectives to choose from, SaGa: Emerald Beyond sounds like it has all the makings of a solid "Choose Your Own Adventure" type of experience. If you enjoy forging your own paths in games, keep this one in mind . . . and see where the Emerald Waves take you! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: APRIL 25, 2024 RATING: RP

# SOUTH PARK: SNOW DAY!

**Battle your way through a blizzard in the latest from the Comedy Central cartoon series.**

**HAPPY 25TH ANNIVERSARY,** South Park!

We're just a few months removed from that milestone, so it's not too late to remember the original South Park video game that made it onto store shelves just before Christmas 1998. The original South Park video game that was called "one of those games that is bound to come up when you start thinking about the worst game you've ever played." GameSpot gave us that killer quote while giving the game a 1.4 out of 10 review score. Though, to to be fair, that was for the PlayStation version. The N64 version got a 5.8.

South Park, the irreverent Comedy Central cartoon series, had just burst onto the scene one year earlier – and Acclaim, who'd quickly snapped up the video game rights before the show got popular, put their developers into a crazily crunched timeline of just six months to get that first game out the door. It showed. South Park, in all its versions, was clearly rushed. A first-person shooter quickly built on the back of the Turok engine (because it had to be; they didn't have time to do anything more ambitious), South Park suffered from technical issues, bland level design and repetitive gameplay.

OK, OK. Enough blasting that old game. I bring it up because the poor reception to it, and its two fast follow-ups also on the N64, caused Comedy Central to pull the reins *way* back on the brand in the video game space. South Park game releases slowed *way* down, as the IP holders and creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone became much more selective about approving future titles. That more cautious handling of the cartoon and its characters has paid off in recent years, as modern South Park video games like The Stick of Truth and The Fractured but Whole have been received much more positively – both of them earned 8s and 9s in their reviews and have sold well enough to justify making more.

So, finally, we arrive at Snow Day! Though the cartoon's been active for over a quarter of a century, this will be just the 10th official video game for the South Park brand, and it's shaping up to be another of the good ones.

A massive blizzard has blanketed the city of South Park with even more snow than usual, and also cancelled school. That means the local kids are free to run amok in the streets all day! And that's exactly what you do: You create a New Kid persona, join forces with up to three friends online to make your own faction, then go to war against all the other kids in town to establish your dominance. You know, just like the snow days you remember from growing up!

South Park got off on the wrong foot in the video game world, but the future's looking bright! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: THQ NORDIC DEVELOPER: QUESTION
RELEASE: MARCH 26, 2024 RATING: M

# TOUCH DETECTIVE 3 + THE COMPLETE CASE FILES

## A newly localized sequel, packaged together with upgraded re-releases of its predecessors!

**DETECTIVE MACKENZIE,** her mushroom pal Funghi and her butler Cromwell are back on the case – and this time around, all of their adventures will be available to play in the West!

Touch Detective, a point-and-click mystery adventure series, initially debuted in 2006 on Nintendo DS. It will arrive on Switch in a new collection, Touch Detective 3 + The Complete Case Files, on March 28.

The collection includes Touch Detective, Touch Detective 2 ½, Touch Detective Rising 3: Does Funghi Dream of Bananas? and two bonus cases featuring Funghi. This marks the first time the third game and those additional cases will release in the West! They came out in Japan for the 3DS in 2014 and for Switch in 2022.

The collection also features improved localization of the first two games and more than 500 digital materials, including concept art, comics and music from the entire series.

Touch Detective is, well, exactly what it sounds like. The series' gameplay heavily utilized the DS' touchscreen when it released for that system. Everything you do to solve mysteries as Mackenzie, from interacting with the environment and talking to different characters to collecting and using items in your inventory was managed by the touchscreen.

Not to mention Mackenzie herself enjoys touching things and keeping a notebook about what they feel like. The name has a humorous double meaning there, as she is also dubbed the "Touch Detective" (much to her dismay).

It'll be interesting to see how this gameplay translates to the Switch, though publisher Nicalis has said that the collection can be played via the Switch's touchscreen or standard controls. The graphics have had a boost too, which can only enhance the series' zany chibi art style.

The many cases you'll solve as Mackenzie also fit this particular vibe. She has a knack for finding herself in the midst of bizarre happenings, and each game features four to five mysteries where she can put her skills to the test.

The first Touch Detective game involves solving four cases in her small town of Osawari, so she can prove herself to the Great Detective Society and join them.

Touch Detective 2 ½ has five cases to take on that feature everything from a living doll in a haunted mansion to a museum heist.

The third Touch Detective title also provides five cases for Mackenzie to test her mettle, which include a mecha Funghi sighting and a rival detective who comes to challenge her.

As someone who missed out on a lot of the DS era, I'm always happy to see games like these be re-released and become easier to access and play. Here's hoping this collection touches all the bases for old and new fans!
**– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NICALIS DEVLOPERS: SUCCESS & BEEWORKS RELEASE: MARCH 28, 2024 RATING: E

# LLAMASOFT: THE JEFF MINTER STORY

## Digital Eclipse's Gold Master Series continues!

**IF YOU'VE BEEN** following Digital Eclipse's work for the past few years, you know that they've been up to some really cool stuff in the realm of video game history preservation. What started in the SNK 40th Anniversary Collection and was perfected in Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration has given way to what they call the Gold Master Series, and it looks like we won't have to wait much longer for their next interactive documentary! Following last year's spectacular The Making of Karateka, Digital Eclipse is bringing the wild world of retro European PC games to the masses with Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DIGITAL ECLIPSE DEVELOPERS: DIGITAL ECLIPSE & LLAMASOFT RELEASE: MARCH 13, 2024 RATING: T

Most people today probably know Minter's name in relation to Atari titles like Tempest 2000 or the recent reimagining of Akka Arrh, but he's been making fascinatingly psychedelic games for a lot longer than that, and this new compilation aims to inform anyone who plays it exactly why they should care.

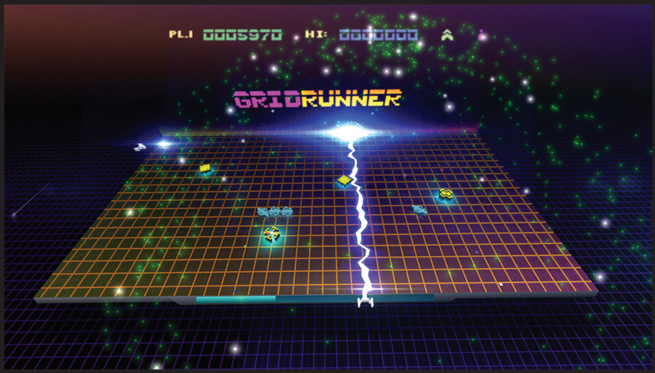
The purpose of the Gold Master Series is to celebrate and inform players about the games that shaped the industry in a rather novel way. All of the information, photos, videos and, yes, the games themselves, are presented via an interactive timeline that puts everything in chronological order. This allows players to experience these games with the historical context necessary to appreciate them for more than just how fun they are to play. Everything from high-resolution packaging scans to developer interviews will tell the story of Jeff Minter's career, all pieced together in an easy-to-digest, high-quality interactive experience that's far more than just a retro game compilation.

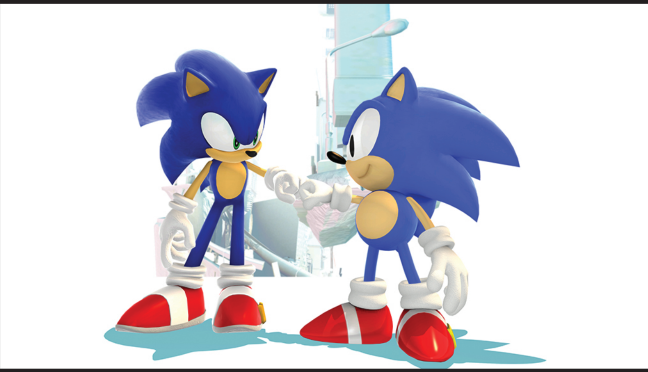
But where The Making of Karateka showcased a single game in multiple forms, this new collection will include 42 unique games that span multiple decades, the bulk of which were created for various home computers like the Commodore 64, Atari ST and more. And don't worry, if you're unfamiliar with ancient European home computers with names like Sinclair ZX81 and VIC-20, this collection will get you up to speed.

As for the games themselves, they're largely arcade-style action affairs that feature a peculiar focus on animals. Intergalactic llamas, space sheep and more star in these strange, yet incredibly influential games that most people in the United States have probably never played before, including Attack of the Mutant Camels for the Konix Multi-System, a platform that was never actually released!

Each of these games will include modern quality-of-life improvements like screen filters, save states, etc., and like The Making of Karateka before it, Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story will also include a new, reimagined version of one of his classics in Gridrunner Remastered.

There's a lot of talk these days about the preservation of video game history, and while there are a number of great books written on the subject, there's no better medium to learn about video games than video games themselves. What Digital Eclipse has started with the Gold Master Series isn't just a fun way to experience some of the most influential classic games ever created, but also a great way for people all over the planet to learn about the history of our world's most popular form of entertainment. For anyone into video game history, this is definitely one to watch! **— KRIS**





# SONIC X SHADOW GENERATIONS

## It's a remake . . . and it's a new game?!

**FOR YEARS,** Sonic Generations has been widely regarded as one of the best Sonic the Hedgehog video games in the Blue Blur's storied history – which makes a certain amount of sense, given the title itself encompasses so much of it. As a result, fans have been clamoring for a remake – or in Nintendo fans' case, just a port to their platform (and no, the Nintendo 3DS version, while a fine game in its own right and certainly a worthwhile portable companion to the console title, does not count).

Then we got Sonic Colors: Ultimate, and fans were like, "Nah, we're good."

But it was apparently too late, for the wheels of fate had already been set in motion once again! And this time, the remake isn't just Ultimate – it's the Ultimate Life Form.

Or rather, it features him, and more prominently than before.

In January, during Sony's latest State of Play broadcast, Sega revealed to the world that the remake will be called Sonic X Shadow Generations. (Try not to overthink it). And this time, it looks like it's not being outsourced to Sonic Colors: Ultimate developer Blind Squirrel Games, but rather, according to listings, it's being developed by Sonic Team itself!

And so the fans rejoiced and sang "All Hail Shadow."

Speaking of which: While the main story once again follows Modern Sonic and his younger self, Classic Sonic, through a variety of stages spanning the course of their heroic careers in both Modern (2D & 3D Boost-focused gameplay) and Classic (sidescrolling platforming) styles to stop the ravenous Time Eater from devouring all of history, Shadow gets more to do than just being a Rival boss battle and final boss cheerleader.

And why not? After all, he's older now than Sonic was when Generations originally came out. Yeah. Let *that* one sink in.

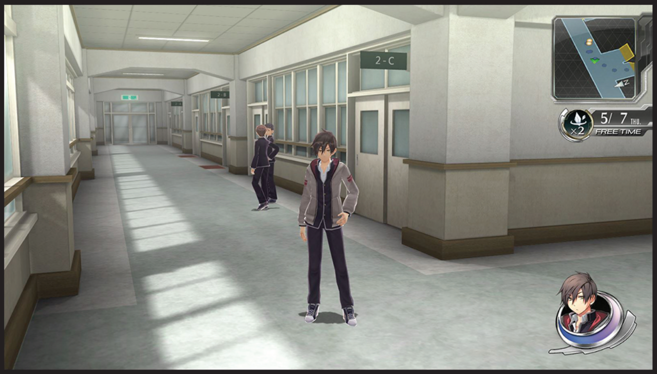
This time (pun not intended, but happily claimed), Shadow has an entire, all-new campaign of his own to traverse. His old nemesis, Black Doom, has returned from . . . er, his apparent doom, to torment our tormented anti-hero some more. Oh, and take over the world, too, I guess. Now, fans will get to experience All of Me – *er,* him – as he dives back into his dark past to explore his backstory, unlock never-before-seen inner powers and abilities, and confront old and familiar foes. It's sure to be a **Chaos Blast!** *[Note: Chaos Blast attack not confirmed as of this writing.]*

While Shadow's adventure log may not be as lengthy as Sonic's, he's still seen his fair share of action that Sonic Team can draw from for his campaign, including his debut in Sonic Adventure 2 as well as his own self-named title, Shadow the Hedgehog.

"With Shadow's portion of the title," said Sonic Team Creative Officer Takashi Iizuka, "players will get to know him more as a character and understand his motivations. It will create the ultimate celebration of Classic Sonic, Modern Sonic and Shadow gameplay that all fans will surely enjoy."

As if that weren't all good enough, Sega has also recently released a special Shadow skin (taking "skin" pretty literally) for Sonic Superstars as a free download which can be worn in Story Mode. It's Chaos Control like never before! **— DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASE: FALL 2024 RATING: RP




# TOKYO XANADU EX+

## High school students get to have all the otherworldly adventures, don't they?

**NIHON FALCOM RPG** Tokyo Xanadu will return to its handheld roots when it arrives on Switch this Summer.

This action RPG first released in 2015 for the PlayStation Vita in Japan. Since then, an enhanced version, dubbed Tokyo Xanadu eX+, has come to PC and PS4 in recent years. Last year, it arrived on Switch in Japan, and now that port is set to come West.

The eX+ version of the game has additional content including new story scenarios, time attack and boss rush combat modes, and new playable characters, monsters, dungeons and bosses.

This upcoming Switch port in particular will also include all DLC and a revamped localization from Aksys Games, who handled the initial localization back in 2017.

Tokyo Xanadu eX+ stands apart from other Nihon Falcom titles due to it not belonging to their two flagship series, Trails and Ys, though it does have some fun Easter eggs from those series and similar gameplay elements.

For example, the game features a character named Towa whose first name and appearance match a character from the Trails of Cold Steel series. The games aren't connected, but Towa's endearing personality and her role as a teacher in Tokyo Xanadu provide a fun Trails callback.

Tokyo Xanadu is a standalone adventure. It takes place in 2015, in the fictional Morimiya City on the outskirts of Tokyo. Ten years before the events of the game, the area experienced a massive earthquake, and the city has been slowly rebuilt ever since.

Not all is well within the city, however, as a parallel world called the Eclipse emerges and begins to cause supernatural incidents in the area.

That's the situation where we find the Tokyo Xanadu cast. Protagonist Kou Tokisaka, along with six others – all of them high school students – join up to investigate the Eclipse and fight against the enemies found there.

Other cast members include Asuka Hiiragi, a calm, cool and collected young woman who seems to be the model student, dedicated and talented martial artist Sora Ikushima, and Yuuki Shinomiya, a lazy yet extremely intelligent hacker.

Gameplay-wise, Tokyo Xanadu borrows elements from both Trails and Ys. Much like Trails of Cold Steel, the game features school simulation gameplay balanced with dungeon crawling. There's also a bonding system, where you can deepen your relationships with the main cast.

The equipment interfaces look a lot like Trails of Cold Steel's, and Tokyo Xanadu has a similar system to Trails' Quartz, where you can customize your abilities and stats by equipping different elemental items.

Combat and dungeon crawling borrow more from Ys, with real-time hack 'n slash gameplay. The main characters employ different weapons and have their own basic attacks, skill attacks and elemental affinities. Kou uses a mid-range sword whip called Raging Gear, while another hero, Rion Kugayama, summons wings that she uses to slash through enemies.

When Tokyo Xanadu released on Switch in Japan last year, lots of fans, myself included, hoped it would come West on the console. I'm glad to see it didn't take too long! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: AKSYS GAMES
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RELEASE: SUMMER 2024 RATING: RP

# SNUFKIN: MELODY OF MOOMINVALLEY

## Restore harmony in this music-rich adventure!

**TOVE JANSSON'S MOOMIN** stories have entertained us for over 75 years, and March 7, a new story will unfold on the Nintendo Switch. Snufkin: Melody of Moominvalley is a brilliantly colorful and musical adventure game that feels like you're walking into a picture book! Hyper Games has combined Tove Jansson's art style with a beautiful watercolor-on-textured-paper look for the graphics, with an ethereal and soothing soundtrack in collaboration with Icelandic group Sigur Rós.

For those not familiar with the Moomins, they are a family of three friend-shaped, hippo-like creatures – Moominpappa, Moominmamma and Moomintroll – who live a carefree life in Moominvalley, along with all sorts of other fantastic creatures like Hemulens, Fillyjonks and Hattifatteners. Snufkin, the star of the game, is a wanderer who spends his time enjoying nature and playing his beloved harmonica. After promising to meet his best friend Moomintroll at the beginning of spring, Snufkin returns to the valley to discover that its river has dried up, its plants have withered and Moomintroll has failed to show up for their meeting – and worse, ugly parks and signs forbidding *anything* fun have littered the valley!

Snufkin's travels around the valley involve interacting with fallen trees and piles of rocks to create bridges and stepping stone pathways. Also, by helping creatures in need and running through bushes and piles of leaves, his inspiration level goes up, allowing him to play his harmonica for an appreciative audience. When he encounters the dreaded parks, he'll topple statues and uproot signs while dodging the prying eyes of police to turn sterile order into natural chaos. He just needs your help to do it! – **REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: RAW FURY DEVELOPER: HYPER GAMES
RELEASE: MARCH 7, 2024 RATING: E

# WORLD OF GOO 2

## Have you ever built a bridge out of jelly?

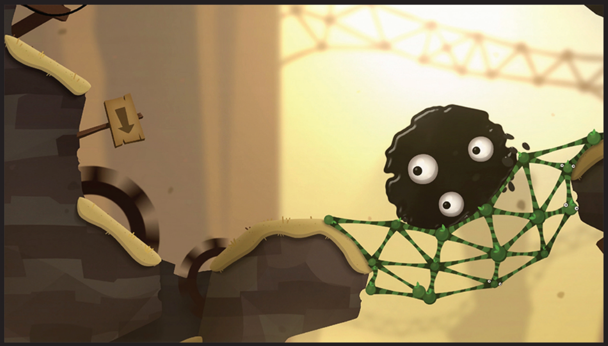
**WHEN WORLD OF GOO** first launched on WiiWare in October of 2006, the online platform was mired in a sticky mix of cautious optimism and hardcore disrespect, depending on if you were rooting for or against Nintendo's little white box. Much to the haters' surprise, the game went on to sell big numbers on the platform, quickly making back the roughly $100,000 it cost to produce, before launching developer 2D Boy into the upper echelons of indie developers. This little wobbly bridge made of harmless balls of sentient sludge had brought them across the cavernous ravine of game self-publishing, and into the land of millionaires!

That was 15 years ago now, and while 2D Boy has put out plenty of other games since that time, none of them have had the same kind of mainstream success as the original World of Goo. And so, as we're likely nearing the end of the Switch's life cycle, those goofy goo balls are on the cusp of all-new adventures on Nintendo consoles!

All we have is a brief trailer to go by, but from the looks of it, the physics-based construction puzzles of the original are back, but with new factors in play. Now there are giant goo pools, with pipes sloshing forth veritable rivers of the stuff. There are also giant, multi-eyed goo blobs, a high-speed train covered in goo webs, a sleepy tentacled beast and a potential visit from friends (or foes) from space!

We'll be sure to find out more about World of Goo 2 (or as it should have been called, World of Goo, Too) in the coming weeks, as the game is set to launch in the near future (specifically, on May 23, 2024). And if you're hungry for more in the meantime, and missed out on the original WiiWare release, check out World of Goo 1 on the Switch right now! Despite being nearly two decades old, this baby-faced bag of googly-eyed boogers still plays just as goo(d) as gold. – **JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: TOMORROW CORP. DEVELOPER: 2D BOY
RELEASE: MAY 23, 2024 RATING: E



# PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

## Mario isn't the only playable hero. Peach and Bowser get their turns too!

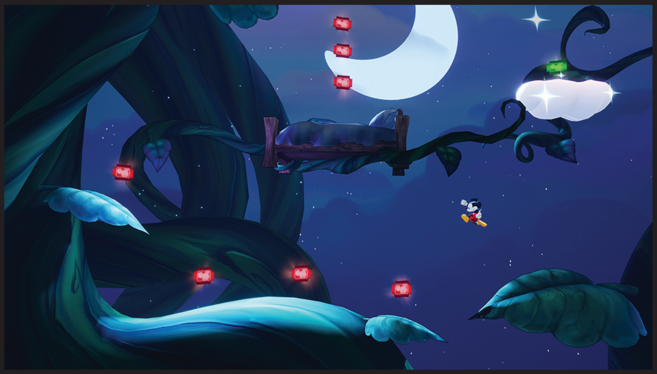
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: TBA 2024 RATING: E

**ARRIVING HOT ON** the heels of the Super Mario RPG remake – which let both Peach and Bowser join Mario as playable party members – it may feel a little sad that they won't work as a team again in this RPG remake too.

But never fear! Though Mario recruits other allies for his primary party in The Thousand-Year Door, both Peach and Bowser are still playable!

Bowser gets to turn the tables on the old Super Mario Bros. style of side-scrolling by stomping, smashing and firebreathing his way through 2D action sequences. Sometimes he even grows Super big, taking up nearly the entire screen with his menacing, turtle-y bulk! It's a ton of fun.

Peach's playable portions are more subdued, but add critical layers of depth to the story as she interacts with the villainous supercomputer TEC after being kidnapped by the baddies of this particular quest, a group called the X-Nauts. She had similar intermission scenes in the first Paper Mario game, and they help break up what would otherwise be nonstop Mario screentime. These scenes are just one more reason why this, of all Paper Marios, is so beloved! **— LUCAS**



# DISNEY EPIC MICKEY: REBRUSHED

## The artistic Wii adventure gets a fresh coat of paint.

**NO ONE PROPS** up princesses like Disney. I learned that for myself back in 2010, after Disney flew me to a Disneyland press event for Epic Mickey. The instant I turned on my hotel TV, Snow White and Cinderella showed up on screen, chirping in sing-song voices about the rules of the theme park and what to expect from my stay.

The line between fantasy and reality was already starting to blur. But the problem was, I was a poor video game blogger, and Disney only supplied me with a $15 food voucher, enough for a small portion of steamed broccoli and sautéed mushrooms. It's hard to feel whisked away to a dream-like wonderland when you're sitting alone at a restaurant, staring at your plated fungus and vegetables while happy families scarf down burgers and fries a few tables over.

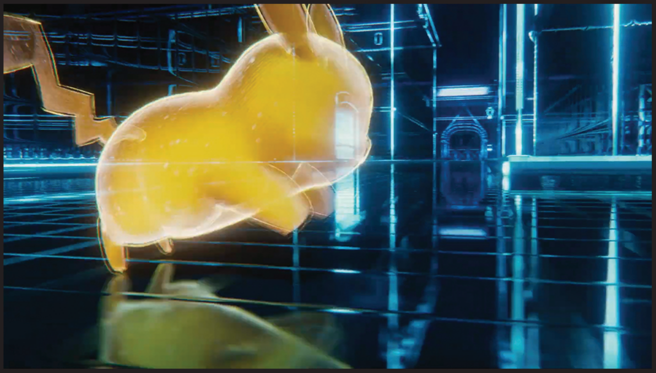
Epic Mickey suffered from similarly dashed hopes. The next day at that press junket, director Warren Spector, known for Deus Ex and System Shock, took us through a tour of several key Disneyland locations, describing how his game would reshape these places into fantastic new virtual worlds, where Mickey would use paint or paint thinner to become either a hero or a menace. He also took us to Walt Disney's secret on-site apartment, situated in a regular-looking building, perched up high so he could watch the way patrons of the park engaged with the attractions, just as Spector would watch us as we tried out his game for the first time.

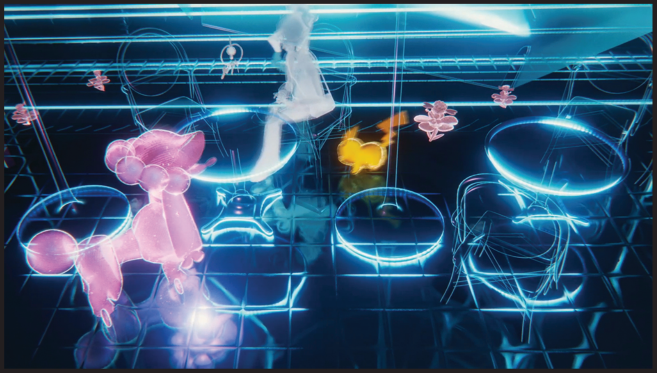
And he wasn't too happy with what he saw.

Despite his best efforts to literally and figuratively transport us to dark and magical places, the truth was that Epic Mickey was less a "mind-blowing epic" and more a "pretty good video game." And while that's nothing to be ashamed of, it's clear that there was potential for more. The game's broken-down animatronic characters beat Five Nights at Freddy's to the punch by a country mile, and Mickey's power to erase and remake the world came well before Minecraft made that concept more mainstream. But neither of those aspects of Epic Mickey feel like the focus. Most of the time, it's a standard 2D and 3D platformer, albeit with tons of references to Disney cartoons, movies and real-life locations.

Fans had hoped that some of the wilder concepts planned for Epic Mickey would make their way to the two other games in the franchise, but they were both relatively tame. Let's hope this Rebrushed remaster, which adds new moves like dashing and ground pounding, paints a better picture for Mickey's would-be epic future. **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: THQ NORDIC
DEVELOPER: PURPLE LAMP
RELEASE: TBA 2024 RATING: E





# POKÉMON LEGENDS: Z-A

## 2022's successful spin-off has earned itself a sequel! But . . . what exactly will it include?

**THE POKÉMON COMPANY** does love their teasers, don't they?

As the finale to their annual Pokémon Presents video event on February 27 this year, they announced a brand-new sequel to Pokémon Legends: Arceus. But . . . they didn't give us much info beyond that! Let's present the few facts we have for sure, and then speculate to try to fill in the gaps.

First up, the new game is called Pokémon Legends: Z-A. It takes place in the Kalos region (previously seen in the Gen VI games, Pokémon X & Y), and features a newly reimagined take on that region's urban centerpiece, Lumiose City. It's going to feature the return of Mega Evolution in some form or fashion, and it's being planned for release on the Switch in 2025.

. . . That's it! That's all we got. The debut video for the game was all conceptual, with no actual gameplay in it. Instead, it featured a glowing Pikachu running around a wireframe version of Lumiose City — like he was dashing through a 3D-projected blueprint. The Tron vibes were strong, leading many to instantly predict that this Legends game will take place in the far future, in stark contrast to Legends: Arceus, which featured a story set in the distant past.

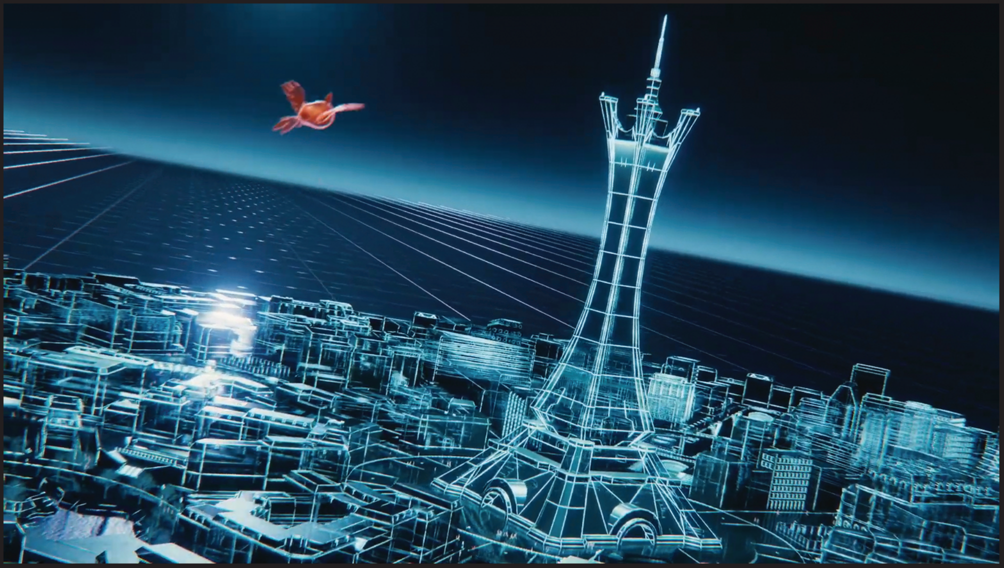
Here's another interesting nugget: Nintendo of America's Twitter account, to promote the trailer, claimed that this new game is "set entirely within Lumiose City." That would be a wild contrast with Legends: Arceus as well — that game was almost entirely about exploring the untamed wilderness of ancient Sinnoh, when it was still known as the Hisui region. There were hardly any human inhabitants in the area at all, and their town of Jubilife was comprised of just two streets' worth of buildings. For Legends: Z-A to offer the total opposite could be fascinating! A completely urban adventure, locking us inside a sprawling, living city? Some series, like Sega's Yakuza/Like a Dragon franchise, have worked wonders with complex, interwoven cityscapes as their settings. Having such a place to explore, but also having it packed with Pokémon, is an intriguing idea.

. . . If Game Freak can pull it off. On a technical level. I don't have to remind you all again about how much of a garbled mess Scarlet & Violet were. Legends: Arceus performed and was programmed better, but it's clear that we've reached a point where Game Freak's creative ambitions have outpaced their ability. They need to bring in extra programming help, or something!

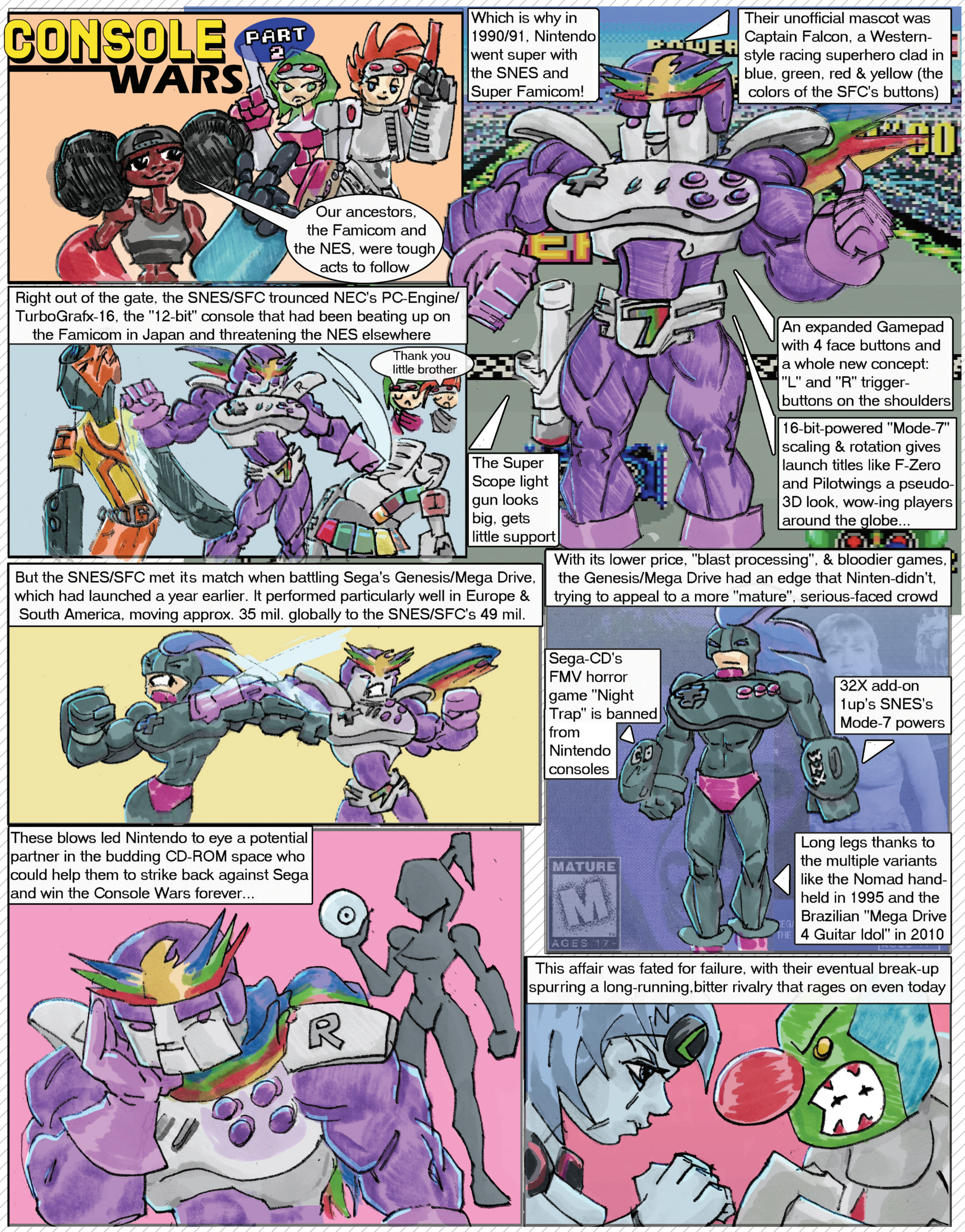
Maybe that's why they went with a total concept trailer instead of trying to show any piece of gameplay right up front. I'll hope that's an indication that they're taking their time, and that when we do finally see the real game in action, it'll be in much better shape than their other recent efforts.

On the lore side of things, we could get an intriguing story here . . . one we were perhaps first meant to see years ago? X & Y never did get a "Z" version to follow them up, though we and many other outlets speculated about that strongly several years ago. The Zygarde tale that was likely left on the cutting room floor back in the 3DS era seems like it's being revived now. And remember AZ? The weird 3,000-year-old guy in X & Y? His name backwards is Z-A . . . that's no coincidence.

Questions and more questions! This one's captured my interest! **— LUCAS**



SWITCH PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK RELEASE: TBA 2025 RATING: RP




BY JONATHAN HOLMES & PETE MARSHALL

## PRINCESS PEACH GETS A NEW LOOK

**SUPER MARIO BROS. 2**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM,
1986

Peach's first appearance is infamously unflattering, as her sprite in the original Super Mario Bros. seemed, well, stiff. Nintendo must've thought so too, decades ago, because she got a redesigned, forward-facing sprite for Japan's Super Mario Bros. 2! (Or The Lost Levels, if you prefer the American name.) Even still, not everything was peachy keen. She recited a new poem when rescued in this sequel, but if you played as Luigi, the near-rhyme of "Mario" with "hero" got lost in the middle. More shockingly, the background then faded from black to sky blue . . . which broke the look of the Princess and her loyal Mushroom Retainers. Because their sprites were made to be viewed on black backgrounds, their eyes appeared hollow and lifeless when they were displayed on blue instead! Eeek!! — **LUCAS**

# 18 YEARS LATER
# SUPER PRINCESS PEACH

## Looking back on the mighty monarch's first headlining role!

**I'M SO EXCITED,** or nervous, or happy or . . . just plain *emotional* to take a trip back to Vibe Island and talk about Super Princess Peach! This is the first game that Princess Peach got to star in as the protagonist of her own adventure (other than her Game Watch, but more on that later), and the developers decided to make it about Peach's emotions. While that is disappointing from several standpoints, I'll be avoiding that topic because we're here to talk about the gameplay.

Most critics at the time focused on how easy Super Princess Peach was to play, and how disappointing its spoonfed tips and strategies were. While the game isn't particularly difficult, it certainly became challenging in the later levels, and while the handholding was annoying, it was also optional – all the tips came in Message Blocks that Peach had to deliberately hit.

After playing Super Mario Bros. Wonder, I think Super Princess Peach has more in common with that game than many others. It lacks a timer, it has very few consequences for failing and its difficulty has a steeper ramp toward the end. Super Princess Peach's Toad Shop is even mirrored in SMBW, as coins collected in levels were used for stat boosts, abilities and bonuses.

The story goes that Bowser stole the Vibe Scepter that can control emotions. Bowser then gives it to a Goomba (seriously?) to go and capture everyone in Peach's Castle by making everyone's emotions go haywire. The army then manages to capture Mario, Luigi and a boatload of Toads, who are then spread out to find in all eight worlds of Vibe Island. Peach and Toadsworth return from a walk to find the kidnapping note, Toadsworth gives Peach the mysterious, sentient parasol, Perry, and off she goes to the rescue.

In each world there are five levels and a boss battle. Each level has three Toads to find, and also has puzzle pieces and soundtracks. Peach even makes a curious face when an area has a secret! One nugget the game doesn't disclose is that you have to rescue every lost Toad in order to face the last boss.

So, what's it like to play? Being an early DS game, it had some of the gimmicky DS stuff shoehorned in. Boss battles featured a short minigame where you needed to roll a log with the stylus or tap Boos to protect Peach. Blowing into the mic to shoot bubbles in the Subrella form was especially annoying. Cute, but I didn't want to hyperventilate trying to take out a Blooper!

The core mechanic has you able to control four "Vibes" that affect Peach in different ways, by tapping one of the four hearts on the bottom screen. Joy makes Peach spin and fly, Rage makes her burn and stomp her feet, Gloom makes her cry huge streams of water and run super fast and Calm allows the player to regain hearts in the life meter slowly. While flying in any game is fun, her Joyful spin can clear smoke or defeat cloud enemies. Raging can literally burn bridges, melt ice and pound on enemies, and Gloomy crying can grow plants, put out fire or freeze surfaces. Using different Vibes is admittedly a fun mechanic!

The weirdest part about the whole game is Peach's blank expression when not using a Vibe. Her jumping and slipperiness were also a little squirrely and took some adjusting to. Most Perry abilities unlock when they need to in a level, but you can buy a charging projectile, a ground pound and midair float. The game

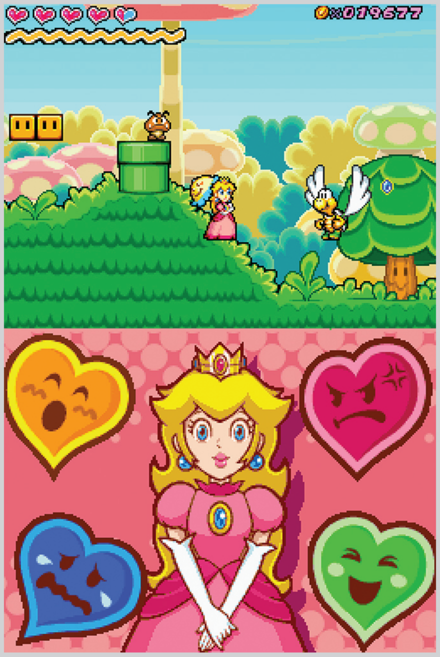
ORIGINAL RELEASE:
NINTENDO DS, FEBRUARY 27, 2006
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: TOSE & NINTENDO SPD, GROUP 2

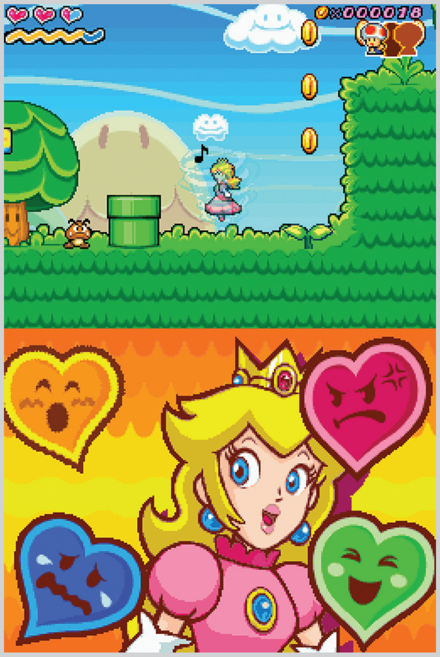
## PLAYING IT TODAY

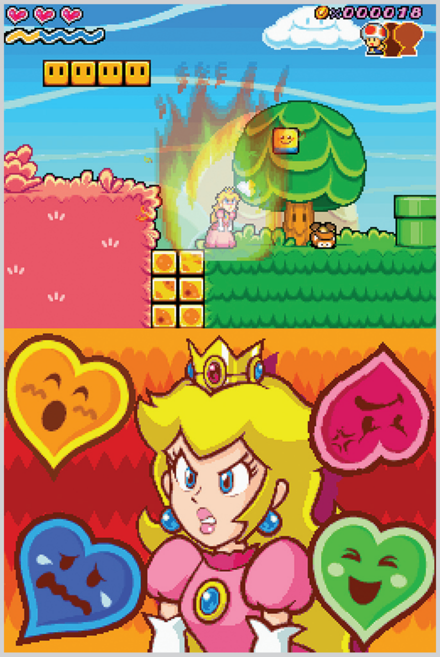
Super Princess Peach has only ever been released once, on its original, physical Nintendo DS cartridge that you could've found on retail store shelves exactly 18 years before the publication of this NF issue. (They're probably not there any more!) They are available on eBay, though, as several listings are currently available in the ballpark of $30 – some loose carts, but others with boxes included too. Venture there first on your search!

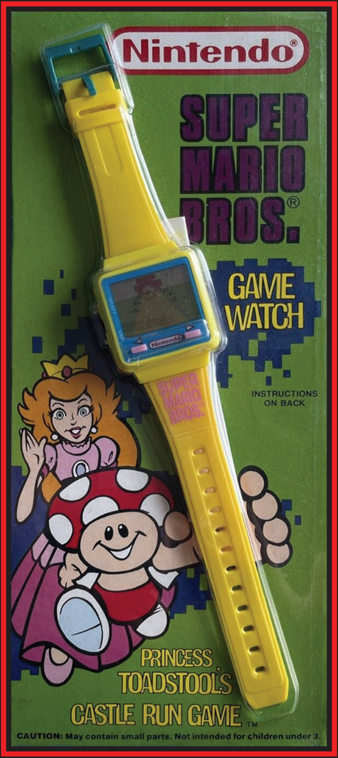
Though several of Nintendo's first-party DS titles got digital re-releases in the Wii U eShop era, Super Princess Peach was not one of them. It's one of those DS games that can probably never be perfectly ported to another platform, thanks to its use of DS features like the touchscreen and microphone for minigames. But a modern release could get close enough! If Nintendo deemed it worthy!

Maybe if Princess Peach: Showtime! turns out to be a truly sensational seller, the good old Big N will begin to look back and reconsider re-releasing this adventure!










## HER REAL FIRST STARRING ROLE?

In 1990, a McDonald's promotion offered three different Mario-themed LCD watch games: one starring Mario himself, another featuring Luigi and a third headlined by Peach! "Princess Toadstool's Castle Run" had players direct her steps as she dashed toward her castle in the distance, moving left and right to avoid tripping over Koopa Troopas placed in her pathway. It was extremely simple, but also technically her first title role if you want to count it!

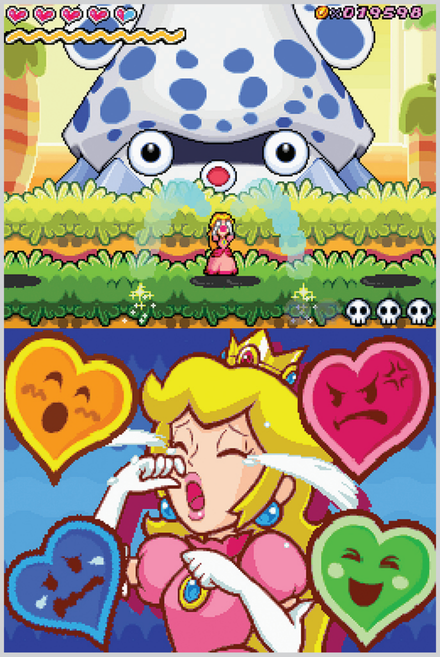
lacks Peach's trademark floating jump, and instead supplants it with a parasol glide, which feels a lot like Yoshi's flutter jump.

In fact, the game takes a lot from Yoshi's Island. While it doesn't use its trademark crayon art style, the enemy designs, platforms and other elements all stem from that series, and some of the assets may have even just been ported here. It makes me wonder if it was meant to be a Yoshi game, but maybe since the console was already inundated with Yoshi games, Peach stood in? The animation is also top-notch, as this was after Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, and I noticed a lot of its spritework having an influence here in cutscenes as well. The developer, TOSE, also made the Starfy games on GBA and DS, and Starfy actually appears as a special enemy in the game!

The game only takes a few hours to complete, but after beating Bowser the adventure opens up some more levels, inviting players to play each level again to find new goodies like more soundtracks and puzzle pieces. Defeating a boss a second time opens up new areas in the next world, and there's a bestiary to fill in as well.

Emotional enemies were fun to see: Gloomy, crying enemies were fast and erratic, and Joyful foes changed patterns, but Rage had all manner of changes! Mad Mecha-Spike Tops would jut out their spike, Mad Goombas would stomp and shake the ground and Mad Boos would float toward you if you faced them!

Super Princess Peach is worth revisiting before Peach's new game because it's cute and fun, but I'm not sure the developer's vision would be as well received today. If nothing else, maybe Perry the Parasol can make a repeat appearance in a future adventure? I'd be so sad to never see him again! **— BRETT**



# WARP ZONE

## What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

**CLAIMING THE COVER** of the March 1999 issue of Nintendo Power was . . . Tonic Trouble? **calls off to the side** Is that right? *Tonic Trouble?* Really? On the cover?!

OK, then. Tonic Trouble. Ten pages of it, even.

Joining it in this issue's Fun Machine coverage were an exclusive preview of Command & Conquer, Vigilante 8, Castlevania (which split poster time with Rayman 2: The Great Escape), Duke Nukem: Zero Hour, Chameleon Twist 2, California Speed, the return of a long-dormant Konami hit in NHL Blades of Steel '99, Rampage 2: Universal Tour and a one-on-one basketball shootout between NBA In the Zone and NBA Jam '99. On Game Boy Color, there was Logical, Power Quest and . . . actually, just Logical and Power Quest.

The 1998 Nintendo Power Awards nominees were announced, and it was a slobberknocker between Banjo-Kazooie and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, each nominated for every category they were eligible for. In fact, the only category they *didn't* share was "Funniest Game." (I guess someone on the NP crew just didn't find the sound Link makes when landing after a long fall as funny as we do.)

Turok 2: Seeds of Evil got a good few nominations, too, but astoundingly, WCW/nWo Revenge and WWF War Zone were nowhere to be found in the "Best Sports Game" category! Can you believe that? Say what you will about wrestling, but you can't have "*sports* entertainment" without the *sport!*

Naturally, those who voted were also entered to win a prize. In this year's case, one grand prize winner would receive a Nintendo 64 system, an N64 Expansion Pack, a Game Boy Color, a Game Boy Camera, a Game Boy Printer, 10 1998 N64 games and five 1998 GBC games of their choice . . . and a Pocket Pikachu. (Ask your parents.)

Closing things out in Pak Watch, we got peeks at Quake II, Gauntlet Legends, Pokémon Snap and something called "Smash Bros." (Eh, it'll never catch on.) Oh, and there was a page tucked in somewhere in the back to let you know the Pokémon Trading Card Game was a thing.

Beetle Adventure Racing burst onto the scene of the April 1999 issue's cover, and was joined inside its pages by A Bug's Life, Triple Play 2000, Re-Volt, Goemon's Great Adventure, Bottom of the 9th, another classic reborn in Lode Runner 3-D, NBA In the Zone '99 and Starshot, and everyone was down with O.D.T. (Yeah you know me!), which shared poster space with Jet Force Gemini. For Game Boy Color, there was only one feature, but it consisted of *three* releases with *two* games each in the Midway Arcade Hits series.

Oh, and Super Smash Bros. again. Was anyone even paying attention to that one?

Well, what if we told you the Player's Poll winner for this month got to walk away with over 50 games starring the roster from that title, the hardware to play them all on, *and* a copy of the game itself? Yeah, you bet you're paying attention now!

Other features included a cheeky look at the Y2K Bug (ask your parents . . . yes, again) and whether it would affect the Nintendo 64. Pikachu also weighed in with some profound words to allay any fears among the Nintendo faithful.

Of further interest was "Global Gaming," which examined the games, magazines and yes, even websites affiliated with Nintendo in Europe, Japan and Mexico. Also, a new Pokémon Center feature took the place of the old "Pokémon Power" inserts.

Pak Watch closed us out with Star Wars Episode I Racer, Army Men and Conker's Pocket Tales. Ah, good, wholesome, Conker . . . I'll bet we'll be seeing plenty more of him after this! **— DAVID**

ISSUE #118: MARCH 1999

ISSUE #119: APRIL 1999

**DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH**
August 30, 1980, in Japan

**FAVORITE FOOD**
Kentucky Fried Chicken

**CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY**
Game Director and Founder of Crim, Inc.

**BEST KNOWN FOR**
Devil May Cry, Steel Battalion, Okami, Fatal Frame: Mask of the Lunar Eclipse, Infinite Space and El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

# SAWAKI TAKEYASU

A chat with the Capcom alum who directed El Shaddai, which is coming soon to Nintendo Switch!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

**NF: To begin, could you tell us how you first got your start working in video games?**

SAWAKI TAKEYASU: I was making a self-produced anime in college, and when it was over, I didn't want to start job hunting, so I was just passing the time casually. Then a friend told me that I was suited for the gaming industry, so I started playing Resident Evil. Impressed by it, I started job hunting, and a year later, I was assigned to the team for the original version of Resident Evil 4, which through the development process, later became the first Devil May Cry.

**What are your biggest creative influences, and what are some of the ways you've worked to integrate them into your games?**

My biggest influence, as a creator, comes from the experience of working on the anime that I independently produced when I was in college. In 1998, I made a 40-minute anime called Blaster to Eternity, under the group name Rainbow Circus Troupe. It looks very cheap by today's standards, but we gathered all the members of the team ourselves, and we learned the process of making things with our own hands, using our own money, and taking risks. The spirit of how we made that anime continues on in my work to this day. That's why I'm excited about the current passion and appreciation of indie games that's become a huge part of the industry, and why I'm making indie games myself now.

As an artist, I was fond of painters such as Klimt, Mucha and Egon Schiele. It is often said that my style is Mobius-like, but I didn't actually know about him and his work until El Shaddai came out. As for anime, I liked robot anime. I watched "Space Runaway Ideon" and longed for its painstakingly designed and realized world. Another favorite was "Gunbuster." It was so creative! It really resonated with my mind.

**You were part of Clover, the studio at Capcom that was known for pushing boundaries of style and auteurship before indie games were really a part of the market. Looking back on it now, how do you feel the studio influenced the kinds of games that get made and played today?**

There was no other studio that was as greedy for being original as that studio, and I mean that in a positive way. I think that being able to draw scroll pictures and menu screen illustrations that appear in the game of Okami was the culmination of my career as a salaryman. I'm still grateful to Clover Studio for giving me the chance to do that when I was just one of the studio staff.

When creating El Shaddai, the goal was to bring forth a new world beyond what I'd helped create with Okami and Devil May Cry — something that cannot be expressed in words. There are some things that are lacking because it was made with the limited resources of a new studio, but I aimed for a view of a world that does not become old or stale even after 10 years of being out on the market. I hope that you will feel that feeling now that exactly 13 years have passed since the original release!

**This issue of our magazine is themed around Princess Peach, so we have to ask about Sakuya, the peach princess you helped to create for Okami. Like Mario's Peach, she's got an air of royalty to her, but unlike Peach, she's a spirit whose actual anatomy sometimes resembles the fruit she's themed after, carefully walking the line between a traditional classy look and overtly revealing wardrobe malfunctions. What were you trying to express with this character, and if you were to work on a new Okami title, is there anything new you'd want to do with her?**

Sakuya was conceived by the whole team, led by the director, so it's a little embarrassing for me to say something alone. But if Okami was getting a new title today that I was working on, I would want to hear what the director wants to do with her now, then do my best to bring their vision to life.

As for what I'd want to do with a new, theoretical addition to the Okami series, I'm always looking to do new things, so I'd like to draw a human version of Amaterasu.

**El Shaddai was your first time directing a game on your own, but my understanding is that you were originally brought on as a designer and artist after the original concept of using the game's story to adapt the Book of Enoch was already in play. What did you think about that concept when you first heard it, and what was it about the idea that inspired you to take the job?**

I was very excited. The Book of Enoch *[Note: an ancient Hebrew apocalyptic religious text that is not considered canonical and is not included in the Old Testament]* was not well known in Japan. Therefore, I felt that it was a complete fantasy world, one that would feel all new for Japanese people. I took on the job because of the relationship of trust with Vijay, the president of Ignition Entertainment (the original publisher of El Shaddai). At his sincere invitation, I decided to work as the director.

**Your designs for Enoch and Lucifer have become icons in their own right. Seeing these ancient figures wearing stylish blue jeans as they enter increasingly surreal landscapes again and again deeply resonates with a lot of people. Were their looks inspired by any celebrities or other fictional characters, or did your ideas for them come from some other source?**

Yes, I used to refer to Hollywood stars in various ways. And I've always loved blue jeans very much, so I've always wondered if I could somehow get them into my games. And yes! For El Shaddai, I thought the best equipment would be jeans, so I put them in. The rest of the ideas came out of the chaotic world that lurks in my mind, so I think it's unique.

**Why did you choose to have Enoch's armor break off throughout his battles?**

I didn't want to put too many gauges and meters on the screen, so when I thought about how to express the physical strength and remaining health of the main character, I remembered a Capcom game called Ghosts 'n Goblins and the destroyable armor system they used, and then adopted it in my own way.

I also thought it would be comedic that all the enemy carcasses that remained at the end of Enoch's journey were naked.

**The Nephilim characters shaped like "yellow hot dogs" in El Shaddai are uniquely lovable and strange, not unlike the Warawara in The Boy and the Heron by Studio Ghibli (though your game was first released over a decade earlier). They even got their own plush toys! When you look at**

ABOUT A FOURTH OF EL SHADDAI IS MADE UP OF 2D ACTION PLATFORMING, THOUGH THE REMAINING 3D ROAMING PORTIONS ARE STILL HIGHLY CURATED, LARGELY LINEAR SETPIECES, TAKING YOU THROUGH A GALLERY OF AMAZING, EVOCATIVE ENVIRONMENTS.

**them, and your whole game, in 2024, so long after you first worked on it, what do you think and how do you feel?**
The Nephilim's inclusion in the game was first ordered by Ignition's headquarters, but their initial designs were very different. They had a scary appearance and hairy bodies, and I didn't think it was that interesting, so I tried something different. That led me to create the designs for them that you see in the game. Initially, I was worried that what I wanted looked out of place, but I also think it was a courageous decision to put such a design in the worldview of El Shaddai.

The Nephilim have a sad story, unlike their appearance. I would be happy to have the opportunity to draw them again.

**What makes now the best time to release El Shaddai for modern consoles?**
I think this is fate for me. I had made various other plans along the way since the original release of El Shaddai, but things didn't go as I expected. Then one day, I found myself here, and it felt right. It was enough to have me asking "Is it God's guidance?"

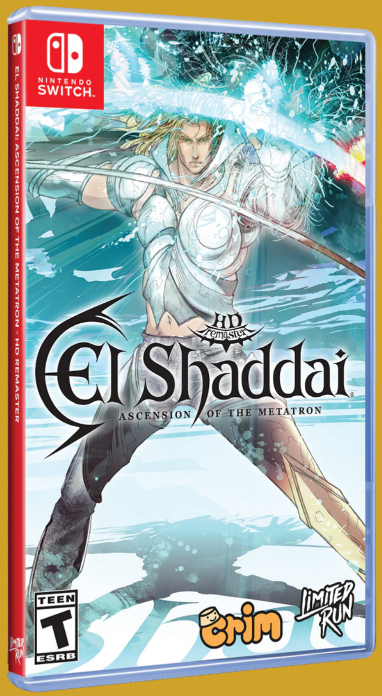
Additionally, meeting Mr. [Hiroyuki] Hayashibara, the main programmer for this remaster, was a big deal. I don't think I would have been able to do the Switch version without meeting him.

**Now that you have the rights to El Shaddai, what other types of games would you like to make in this world and with these characters? Would you want to take more inspiration from other books of ancient scripture?**
I've already drawn a novel and a manga based on El Shaddai, so I'm grateful to have already had the chances to flesh them out further. But if possible, I'd like to see characters from El Shaddai collaborate with the characters in Starnaut, a game I'm currently making. I would like to see Enoch and Lucifer exterminate enemies in large numbers.

**If you had an unlimited budget and total creative freedom to work on any video game or tell any story you wanted to, which would you choose and what would you do with it?**
The El Shaddai story has a total of nine chapters. The game is the fourth chapter. For the HD remaster, I also included a digest of Chapters 5 to 9 in the bonus novel "Lucifer's Fallen," but it would be nice if I had the opportunity to make Chapters 1 to 3 in the game too.

The theme would be the World's Creation, and it would tell the story of Lucifer and Michael creating a group of angels. God declares "Let there be light," and Michael and Lucifer arise. This is where the light that will be born again originates, which sets in motion the holy war with the angels that later begins. It would be nice to have the opportunity to make such a game.

**Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be, and why?**
Of course, I want Lucifer's power to travel through time by snapping a finger. Or I want the luck of being chosen by God like Enoch.

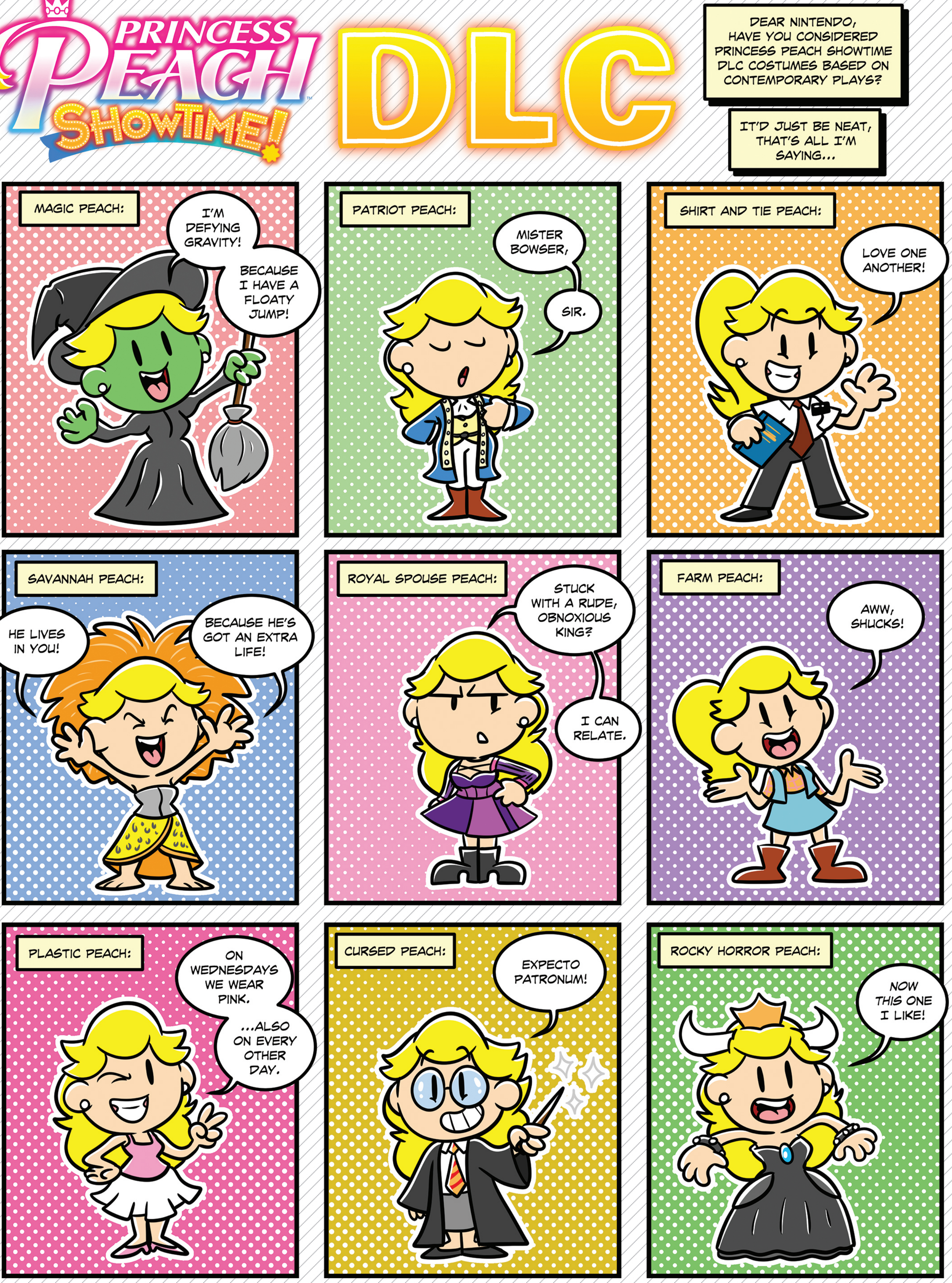



## AN ENCORE FOR EL SHADDAI: ASCENSION OF THE METATRON

Back in 2011, El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron joined other PS3/Xbox 360 games like Dante's Inferno, the original Bayonetta and Shadows of the, uh, *Darned*, to make a quartet of unlikely AA titles that adapted biblical themes, settings and characters into fast, intense action games. Out of the four of them, El Shaddai stood out as the most blazingly strange, trend-bucking title. Published by Ignition Entertainment, it was one of the few games they also developed in-house, a Hail Mary of sorts to make their mark on the industry, shortly before they were purchased by Disney and shut down for good. So, El Shaddai wasn't in a position to receive a port to Nintendo consoles during its initial release, but all that's changed now that it's being re-released by Crim, Takeyasu-san's self-owned studio. The game's cel-shaded graphics, video game-logic embracing mechanics and generally abstract sensibilities have always been more aligned with the The Big N's school of thinking, and now we'll see if the Nintendo faithful agree when El Shaddai comes to the Switch on April 28, 2024.

EL SHADDAI HAS A MASSIVE CAST OF INTERCONNECTED CHARACTERS WHOSE ACTIONS COULD LEAD TO MAN'S ULTIMATE SALVATION OR APOCALYPTIC DOOM. HERE THEY ARE DEPICTED WITH RELATABLE, SURREAL AND THOROUGHLY MODERN CHARM.

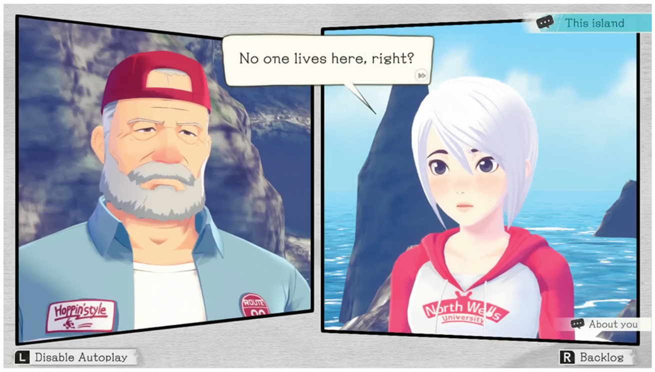
# Princess Peach Showtime! DLC




BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

# REVIEWS

Princess Peach helped pave the way for other leading ladies to step into their own spotlights – including Ashley Robins, star of **Trace Memory** in 2005 and **Another Code: R – A Journey into Lost Memories** in 2009. Both of those adventures have now been remade and repackaged together in **Another Code: Recollection**, and we have our full review ready for you to view!



# Another Code Gets Another Chance

## ANOTHER CODE: RECOLLECTION

**ACROSS ITS LIFESPAN,** the Switch has seen the triumphant return of a good handful of seemingly forgotten Nintendo series from across their vast back catalog of games. Among all the franchises to most recently stage a comeback, the Another Code series (with the original game going under the name Trace Memory in the States) had to be one of the last ones anyone would ever guess would see a return. That goes double considering that the two games in the series acted as showcases for the very specific features of the DS and Wii – not to mention the second game never even saw a release in North America.

Flash forward to 20 years after the release of the first game, where Nintendo and Arc System Works have reignited the long-dormant memories of Trace Memory (DS) and Another Code: R (Wii) into a single reimagined compilation. It's easy to mistake this release as a faithful full HD remake or port of the original titles, but there's actually some rather generous liberties taken here with the source material.

The story here is still the same: Both games tell the two-part tale of Ashley Mizuki Robins as she works to unravel the mysterious pasts of both of her scientist parents amidst and intricate backdrop of sci-fi technology and supernatural phenomena. Aside from paragraphs of text written a bit more succinctly in this version, the narrative remains mostly the same from start to finish.

Trace Memory, here now called Two Memories, introduces us to Ashley on the eve of her 14th birthday. An invitation to the nearly abandoned Blood Edward Island incites her to reunite with her estranged father. As she explores the island for more clues surrounding her father's prior disappearance and the past murder of her mother, things (somehow) get even stranger when she meets a ghost boy named D who needs her help to uncover the dark secrets behind his own demise.

The premise is a perfect setup to start exploring the premises, poking through a dusty empty mansion and following in the footsteps of the prior occupants. In the original game, this often took the form of especially challenging puzzles and interactive moments that all made use of the DS' unique touch input, microphone and dual screens. However, here in this version, these interactions are more or less reduced to a few redesigned puzzles using traditional inputs and a stronger focus on dialogue and story.

It's hard to pretend like the comparative lack of puzzles won't be felt by fans of Trace Memory – the original version was more Myst-like, but here in 2024, Another Code: Recollection definitely reflects the interests and expectations that players have coming into a story-heavy experience today. Two decades ago, a game like this needed a bunch of puzzles to qualify as gameplay, but it's reassuring to know that nowadays, a strong story is more than enough to carry this style of video game.

One of the biggest draws of this compilation is that both games are now presented as one cohesive experience. Once players reach the conclusion of Two Memories, the game transitions directly into Journey into Lost Memories, the Wii sequel. Journey into Lost Memories can't even be accessed without first completing Two Memories, but this makes sense since it expands on the many twists and setups of the first game to result in some pretty satisfying narrative payoffs.

Journey into Lost Memories jumps forward two years – Ashley is now a much more outspoken 16-year-old, trading in her anxious reservation of the first game for a much more confident and vibrant personality. This second adventure brings Ashley back

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, CING & ARC SYSTEM WORKS RATING: T

to an old family vacation spot: Lake Juliet. Upon her arrival, she's immediately met with a convoluted pollution cover-up plot, a mystery surrounding her late mother's unfinished research and a backpack stolen by a runaway tween – but trust me, it all comes together by the end of the story.

As she explores the town, Ashley learns more about Lake Juliet's history and the regular citizens who live there. The original version of this game was certainly lighter on puzzles compared to Trace Memory, trading in the overhead 3D environments of the DS for a novel 2.5D viewpoint that focused much more on dialogue than puzzle solving. In general, Another Code: Recollection seeks to unify both games under a similar tone while glowing up both experiences in full 3D.

The levels and backgrounds definitely can be lacking in fidelity when viewed up close, unfortunately, sporting a lot of low-poly and low-texture modeling. But Another Code: Recollection more than makes up for any visual failings in its environments with some absolutely gorgeous character models throughout. Characters often look like moving paintings and sketches, with brush-stroked shadows and details baked into the surfaces of their textures.

Cutscenes mostly play out in a novel comic book style, with each character occupying their own frame and speaking through cartoonish speech bubbles. It would've been easy to stage characters in this framing as simple talking heads, but rather the dynamic layout and compositions drive home the comic book feel, with characters gesturing with their full bodies throughout.

Ashley in particular looks incredible thoughout both games, with her character model able to emote some rather subtle emotions and expressions quite clearly. The performance by voice actor Kaitlyn Yott really sells the character, with a nuanced contrast between the character at ages 14 and 16. Pay attention to how the slight change in maturity isn't expressed just in the tenor of her voice, but also in the confidence Yott puts behind every line. While many of the performances throughout are fairly standard fare for this type of game, the stirring performance of Ashley helps to keep the game engaging even during some of its slower segments.

Overall, the whole Recollection package manages to keep a pleasantly breezy pace, with a major overhaul to its approach to puzzles. By peppering fewer brainteasers throughout, each with simpler inputs, the game doesn't exactly crawl to halt anymore just because you may find yourself stuck on an especially gnarly puzzle. Even if you do get tripped up, the game has a pretty welcoming built-in hint system that lets loose increasing more helpful hints on a three-tiered system, if requested, and can even point players in the direction of the next gameplay beat with the tap of a single button.

It is a little disappointing that there are fewer puzzles that take advantage of some of the Switch's unique input features. There's only a small handful of them that rely on motion controls, but it would've been neat to see new situations that took advantage of features like HD Rumble or the oft-forgotten IR sensor on the bottom of the Joy-Con (R).

The lighter approach to puzzles at least helps to keep the game moving along quickly, with Two Memories clocking in at somewhere around four to five hours of playtime, and Journey into Lost Memories wrapping at a little over twice that runtime. The first half ends up feeling like a bit more of an appetizer experience. Though, it was a bit jarring at first going from the desolate Blood Edward Island to the much more populated and brightly lit Lake Juliet. The tonal shift can be bumpy at first, but the conclusion of Journey into Lost Memories manages to wrap things up in a way that truly helps to connect the themes of loss and memory that unify both games. You may be surprised how sad it feels to say goodbye to this cast by the end.

There's quite a bit of love and care put into Another Code: Recollection. Almost every decision on display here is made with the intention of unifying and streamlining two games that may be difficult for modern players to go back and play in their original forms.

It's best to approach this package as less of a preservation project and more of a re-evaluation of the original Trace Memory and Another Code: R. There are still reasons to return to the originals, especially if you're in the mood for more puzzles and controller gimmicks, but what's here is an extremely accessible way to experience these classics, which for many, will be for the very first time.

As we enter most likely the final era of the Switch, don't overlook Another Code: Recollection in all the shuffle. Despite a few rough visual edges and a lack of challenge, the story and characters are more than enough to cement the legacy of this series as more than just another dormant memory. **– JOHN-CHARLES**

**8.0**

# The Dark Hour is Upon Us

## PERSONA 3 PORTABLE

**THERE'S BEEN NO** shortage of Persona 3 news lately with the release of its latest iteration, Persona 3 Reload. It's also increased the debate on which version of the game people should play, since none of them (even Reload) are definitive with content from all the respective versions. However, after finishing Persona 3 Portable, I don't think it matters so much how you play this game, but that you take the time play it somehow. Its story, cast and themes will resonate.

Persona 3 Portable is the only version available on Switch at this time. It has a few defining features that both work and don't work in its favor. It's the only iteration of Persona 3 that allows you to choose between a male and female protagonist.

Each protagonist has unique dialogue choices and personalities, different social links (which are bonds you form with the people around you) and romance options.

It made me wish the newer Persona entries included this feature, especially since Persona protagonists are typically silent, self-insert characters. Plus, the female hero is a joy to play. She's the more cheerful of the two; she consistently has hilarious dialogue choices, and all of her social links provide meaningful perspectives on the game's themes of life and death.

The main drawback of Portable involves its presentation. It debuted for the PSP in 2010, and many of its visuals from Persona 3's prior releases on PS2 were scaled down. In Portable, most of the game is presented in a 2D visual novel format, where you move a cursor around to travel the world and talk to people. In other versions of the game, the story is told with 3D models and animated cutscenes.

Some of the game's biggest story beats could pack a bigger punch if the presentation hadn't been changed. In Portable, the only time you see and use 3D models of the characters is in combat and when exploring the ever-expanding dungeon of Tartarus.

Persona 3's solid turn-based combat system includes elements from other games in the series. You use basic attacks and items and summon Personas, each with their own unique abilities ranging from elemental attacks to healing. Fusing Personas provides a fun crafting aspect, where you can combine them and create more powerful ones as you level up.

Navigating Tartarus is less fun. It's pretty repetitive, as you climb more than 250 floors fighting enemies called Shadows and occasionally dealing with bosses. The only things to mix up the experience include small floor design changes and different enemy types, but it really needed more variety overall.

Though the game's negatives stop here and are far outweighed by the positives: its story, cast and themes.

At the start of Persona 3, our hero is a new student, and it doesn't take long for them to become acquainted with the Dark Hour, a phenomenon where most people turn into coffins, Shadows run amok and Tartarus appears. They join the Specialized Extracurricular Execution Squad, who are investigating the Dark Hour.

I don't want to say too much about the story, but you can expect crazy twists and turns as you unravel the conspiracy of the Dark Hour, why it exists in the first place and how the SEES are each uniquely involved.

Though I think what's more impressive is how Persona 3, a story steeped in darkness and death, can illustrate the beauty of life at the same time.

In its many social links, you see how people deal with loss and how they value life, from a terminally ill teenager who's wrestling with his fate to an old couple overcoming the grief of losing their son.

Much like a Persona fusion, these elements birth a meaningful dichotomy that goes beyond the game itself. Death gives life meaning. It reminds us to make the most of our time, no matter what lies ahead. **— MAGGIE**

**9.0**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: ATLUS RATING: M

# I Slipped on Ma' Beans!

## BLUEY: THE VIDEOGAME

**IF YOU'RE A** kid, you're probably already acquainted with the excellence of Bluey. If you're a grown-up, you may not be! And if that's the case, you should fix that oversight as soon as possible. Bluey is a phenomenal show – a truly excellent cartoon that's fully enjoyable by viewers of any age. It's A+ quality.

Bluey as a video game, though, settles somewhere closer to a C.

Bluey: The Videogame (there's that erroneously spaceless spelling again) invites players into the home of the Heeler family and lets them take control of any of the four main characters: Bluey herself, her little sister Bingo, their Mum, Chilli, and their Big Blue Guy of a Dad, Bandit. That alone is inviting: Just being able to be the Heelers and run around their iconic house is already fun. It's a great start.

Even better, the game absolutely nails the look of the show: These characters are spot-on, exactly as they appear in the cartoon. There are some minor quibbles there, like the fact that Chilli's asymmetrical fur pattern only looks correct when she's facing to the right, and gets improperly flipped/mirrored when she looks left. But, other than that, they're perfect.

Praise must also be offered for the audio, as the show's sound is replicated perfectly as well. All of the same voice actors reprise their roles (which isn't always the case for video games), and they perform their characters with the same level of professionalism and joy. Another great aspect.

So, where exactly does this great-looking, great-sounding, fun-to-be-in game world start to fall flat? In the lack of things to do. Bluey: The Videogame is content-thin.

There's a primary story to play through that encompasses four "episodes," each one building on the last as the Heelers seek to find a hidden treasure that Bandit and his brothers buried back in the '80s. The continuity between each of the four chapters is great, as that isn't something the show itself does much of. But what is similar to the show is the episodes' runtime: Bluey cartoons only last for eight minutes or so, and each of the game's chapters can be dashed through nearly as quickly.

Most players will complete the main story here in a single sitting, or perhaps two, which is not getting a lot of bang for your buck. Other than the main story there is a mild collection quest, in which the characters gather items strewn throughout the handful of explorable environments to fill up a sticker book. But that, again, doesn't take too long to finish.

There's a bit more replayability in the four included minigames. There's Keepy Uppy, where you have to keep a balloon from touching the ground. There's Chattermax Chase, where you run after a crazed bird toy to catch it. There's Magic Xylophone, which is Freeze Tag, and there's Ground is Lava – you know what that is.

Passing extra controllers around and having all four Heelers active at the same time adds a bit of extra fun, but once again, this is probably just one or two afternoons' worth of things to do. Kids may want to replay it all, multiple times? Goodness knows my children have rewatched the same episodes of the Bluey show dozens of times. But that's a risk you'd have to assess for yourself.

I think this is a fine first crack at gameifying Bluey's world. For real life! But I hope if they do a sequel that they're able to include a much larger amount of content. **– LUCAS**

**7.0**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER: ARTAX GAMES
RATING: E

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T

# Justice is Served Again

## APOLLO JUSTICE: ACE ATTORNEY TRILOGY

**AFTER THE POPULARITY** of the Switch ports of both the original Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney trilogy and The Great Ace Attorney duology, it was only a matter of time before a collection of the fourth, fifth and sixth games of the mainline Ace Attorney franchise was announced. Luckily for us, the Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney trilogy is available in both digital and physical formats, unlike their original releases on the 3DS.

Seven years after the events of the Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney trilogy, a new generation of lawyers have taken their place in the courtroom: Apollo Justice, with his Chords of Steel and his power to pick up on the most minute of "tells" from witness testimony; and Athena Cykes, who combines her empathetic hearing ability and analytical psychology background with her high-tech Mood Matrix system to break through the discord in witnesses' emotions. With Phoenix assisting them both directly and from the background, their journey through the twists and turns of the legal system takes them from the city streets in pursuit of panty thieves (it makes sense in context) to yōkai-themed villages to an oppressive kingdom on the brink of revolution.

Seeing Apollo Justice's graphics in HD for the first time (I did not play the 3DS port) was a breath of fresh air, especially when I noticed little details like the stubble on the face of the disbarred and disheveled Phoenix Wright. The HD art for all the characters and backgrounds looks great, and while the animations and expressions aren't as fluid as in the latter two games, they looked much brighter and more expressive to me.

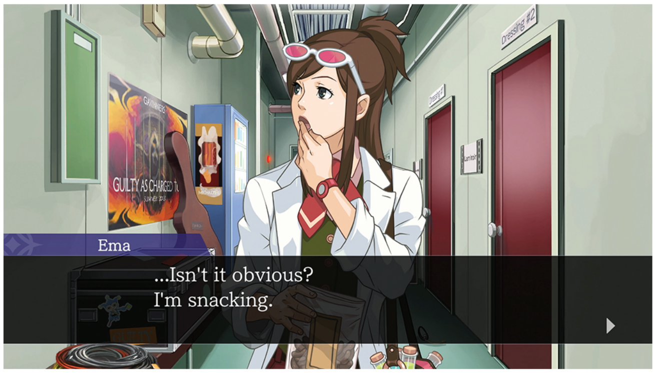
The forensic examinations made a seamless translation from the DS' touchscreen to the Switch's single screen, and there's the bonus of being able to use the Switch's touchscreen as a controller.

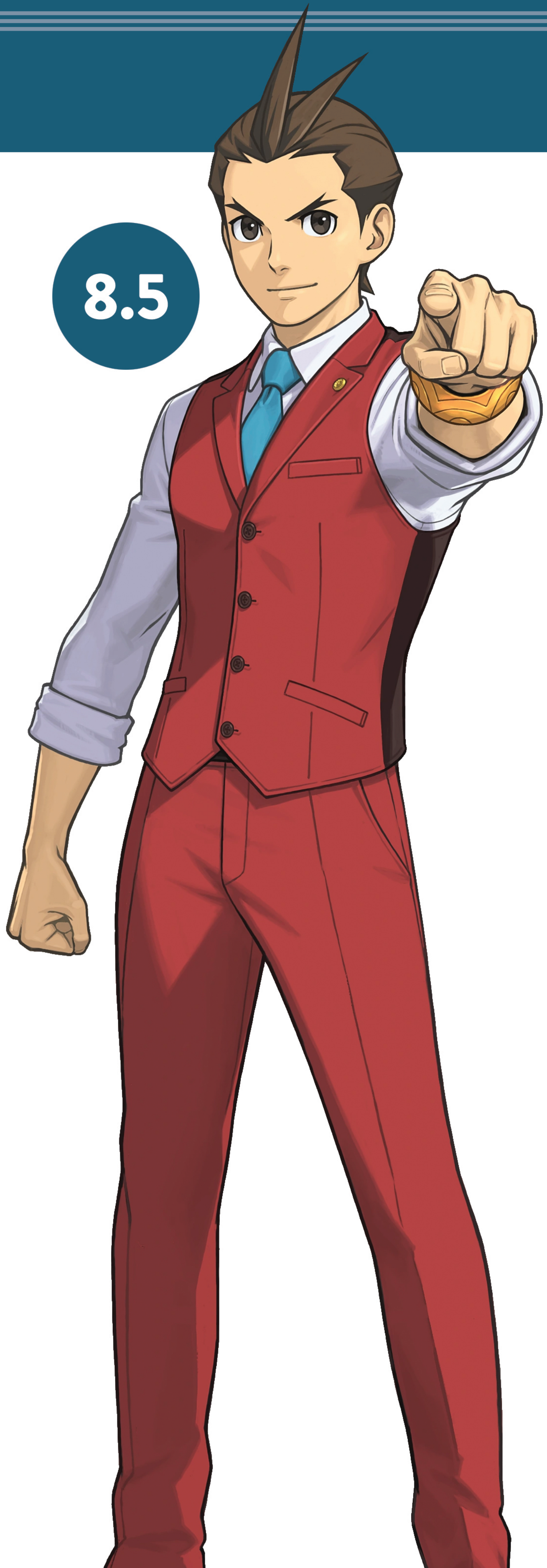
There was one mechanic that I thought should've gotten an upgrade: the sound mixer used during the third case, Turnabout Serenade. While it seems like an ingenious piece of tech, I think the equalizer could have gotten a few design tweaks to show a better visual indication of background noise, instead of a simulated sequence of color LEDs.

The overall story remains a bit of a downer, and while we do get a flashback where Phoenix is behind the bench once again, we're required to play through the flashback as if it were a chapter and not experience it as a cutscene.

While the 3D models of the cast in Dual Destinies look great, they still feel a little rough around the edges compared to how refined they look in Spirit of Justice. However, while it introduces the upbeat Athena and puts Phoenix back into his well-deserved spotlight, this game is *dark*. The opening cutscene involves a courtroom being destroyed by a bomb, and the last two cases deal with a brutal part of Athena's past, complete with flashbacks of her as a child surrounded – and stained – with blood. (Surprisingly, while Dual Destinies was originally released with an M rating in 2013, it was rerated as T for this compilation release, which makes me shake my head a little.) Compared to previous games in the series, Dual Destinies' gameplay is a little more beginner-friendly: There's an investigation checklist accessible in the Court Record menu, there's a Consult function when you're hanging by a thread during trials and the game will automatically nudge you toward the next location after you're finished investigating.

Finally, Spirit of Justice, which I originally reviewed in Issue #24, is still the best-looking and best-performing game in the collection from a technical standpoint. While it does have a case that qualifies as filler arc, the overall story is one of the best constructed in the franchise. My praise for the 3D animations still holds up almost eight years later, even for





**8.5**

something as simple as the dust dancing in a ray of sunlight. Also holding up is my dislike of the Divination Séance mechanic, which involves a visualization of a murder victim's last moments and sensations through their eyes. I found it a lot more confusing than Athena's Mood Matrix, since you not only had to analyze Princess Rayfa's interpretation of the victim's last moments, you had to sync them to a precise moment of their memories, which wasn't always that obvious.

If there's one thing that I wish the Ace Attorney franchise would do better, it would be giving their main characters more time to shine. Klavier Gavin is one of my favorite Ace Attorney characters, and he only gets a cameo role in Dual Destinies, while Athena Cykes and Simon Blackquill get the same treatment in Spirit of Justice. However, Spirit of Justice does give Trucy a focused episode, and reintroduces Maya Fey after a long absence. Plus, Spirit of Justice's bonus case plays like a classic case from the original Phoenix Wright trilogy, complete with Phoenix and Maya facing off in court against Miles Edgeworth.

There are also some great bonus features, but the most fun of them is the Orchestra Hall, which features chibi figures of Apollo, Athena, Trucy and Phoenix playing instruments on stage (with Phoenix struggling to play piano) as other characters join them from the wings. Not only are the soundtracks to all three games available, but there's also bonus music consisting of selections from two of the Ace Attorney orchestral concerts held in Japan. Another major bonus feature is the Animation Studio, which allows you to put character models in front of different backgrounds from the games they appeared in, including chroma-key screens, and includes a sound test of in-court sound effects and dialogue. By itself, it doesn't seem like much, but in the right hands, it can be a very powerful weapon for content creators.

This is a great port of some of the highs and lows of the Ace Attorney franchise, with some of the best story-telling and case-solving mechanics the series has to offer. While I wouldn't recommend it unless you've had at least some experience with the previous games, this could be a great starting point for a beginner to the franchise, especially with how user-friendly the latter two cases are.

Now all we need on Switch are the Investigations games! What do you say, Capcom? **— REBECCA**

# No Princess to Save in This One

## MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG

**IT'S TAKEN A** few decades for the old "damsel in distress" trope to really be phased out of the Mario series, as rescuing Princess Peach from being kidnapped is still the most common reason why our hero undertakes any adventure. Just under 20 years ago, though, the original version of this game helped move his quests in a different direction – because instead of being called to save a lady, good old Jumpman, in this adventure, has to instead recover a bunch of stolen toys!

Donkey Kong is sitting at home, bored, lazily watching TV when he sees a commercial for the fantastic new "Mini-Mario" toys. He runs out to buy one immediately, but seeing that they're sold out, he flies into a rage! He invades the nearby Mario Toy Company and just steals their entire stock of figures, right off the assembly line. Being the hero that he is (and also a businessman who knows that many burgled baubles is bad for his bottom line), Mario instantly sets off in hot pursuit, saving the stolen goods one at a time as they tumble out of DK's oversized, Santa-inspired sack.

Mario vs. Donkey Kong was first released on the Game Boy Advance in 2004, where it served as a sequel to 1994's Donkey Kong on the Game Boy, which was itself a wildly expanded remake of the original 1981 arcade game that first introduced both of these characters. Now, Mario vs. Donkey Kong has its own remake on the Switch, and while it's not *wildly* expanded like that trailblazing 1994 release was 30 years ago, it actually does feature brand-new content – which I didn't expect to see!

On GBA, this game's main campaign featured only six worlds before the credits rolled. On Switch, that's been extended to eight, with the additions of new Merry Mini-Land and Slippery Summit levels sandwiched in-between total visual overhauls of the Advance game's stages. The result is still a short journey, but not quite as short as it could have been.

At least, up until the "end" of the game, that is. Beyond the battle that serves as Mario and Donkey Kong's "final" conflict, a whole 'nother half of the game lies hidden, waiting to be unlocked! There are challenging "Plus" worlds that introduce another new gameplay wrinkle – having to escort a lone Mini-Mario who's holding a key to the locked exit door – and there are Expert stages packed with puzzles that require some genuine thought to work out. In addition to those, there's also a Time Attack option that gets added to every level, provoking power players to replay every past stage to try to complete them as quickly as possible.

So there's a fair amount of meat on these bones! I think Nintendo did themselves a disservice with the free demo they made available in the eShop for this one, as it includes only a handful of the easiest levels drawn from World 1. Playing it leaves the impression that the whole game is a total cakewalk. And that's not true! The later stages and Expert levels aren't crazy hard or anything, but they are actually reasonably challenging.

On to the gameplay evaluation: It's thin. Shallow. The quantity and variety of different levels to play is larger than I thought it would be, but within them all, your basic set of actions remains rather restricted.

This is a "D-Pad + two buttons" kind of game, the likes of which would've worked just as well all the way back in the NES era when it comes to input complexity. Mario can move left and right – fairly slowly, compared to most every other playable appearance he's ever had – and he can climb up and down on ropes and ladders. He can jump, of course, but his basic leaps are not long in this game, nor do they gain much height off the ground. And he can pick up and toss things, like certain enemies, items like trash cans and springboards, and the critical one, the massive key that unlocks the exit door to end each level.

Well, not *each* level. Sometimes the task is getting the key to the door, but other times all you have to do is reach the trapped-in-plastic Mini-Mario toy who's sitting somewhere in the stage and pick him up to win. That can be accomplished incredibly quickly in some stages, especially if you take advantage of Mario's slightly-more-complex extra jump inputs to pull off backflips or handstand spring jumps to gain a lot more height than normal and kind of sequence-break your way past some of the intended obstacles.

After six levels that are one half key retrieval and one half Mini-Mario rescue, you get one stage that has you escorting a line of six Mini-Marios to a toy box, and then a final, direct fight with Donkey Kong to conclude each world. All of this is extremely straightforward (until you get to the locked latter-half stages I mentioned earlier, at least), but one more feature merits mention too: two-player.

Playing all of these stages with a co-op Player 2 along for the ride as Toad adds just enough of a new and interesting bit of gameplay feel to almost justify the whole remake. I was making my way through the stages solo, having only mild fun, when my kids entered the room and wanted to play too. So I passed a second controller over . . . and the fun factor quickly jumped up. Coordinating two heroes' movements to cover multiple tasks simultaneously was verbally chaotic, and the game actually adds a second key that must be retrieved when a Player 2 plays too – so there's more to be done, and the co-op partner isn't just sitting back and watching Player 1 run through everything.

It's not perfect – some too-vertical levels didn't do a good job of keeping both Mario and Toad in frame, which led to some frustrating lost lives. But the game's generous with 1ups, too, in more newly added bonus stages, so that all evens out.

In the end, I'm not amazed by this remake, but I'm also not disappointed. It's a pleasant, basic, uncomplicated video game that newcomers, young players and GBA version veterans can all enjoy. I don't know that I'd pay full retail price, but this is the perfect game to wait and grab during one of those "Buy 2, Get 1 Free" sales. **– LUCAS**

**7.5**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NST RATING: E

# A New Era for Gaming's Prince, Too

## PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE LOST CROWN

**IT'S BEEN FAR** too long since Prince of Persia has been relevant. While the original game wowed with its smooth rotoscoped animations and The Sands of Time became an industry darling with its clever platforming and time-based puzzles, many of their sequels failed to garner as much attention. And unfortunately in response, Ubisoft has placed far more stock in its spiritual successor, Assassin's Creed. But thankfully, Prince of Persia fans have been thrown a bone in the form of The Lost Crown, a brand-new sequel that serves as a fresh start yet with enough familiar elements that it doesn't feel incongruous with what came before. And if you're a fan of the Search Action genre, it shouldn't be missed.

Prince of Persia breaks from tradition in that you don't play as the Prince. Instead, you're cast as Sargon, the youngest member of an elite band of Persian warriors known as the Immortals. Persia has been on the decline for the past 30 years following the death of the beloved King Darius, leaving it open to attack from invaders. After fending off the latest of these invasions, the Immortals are betrayed and the Prince is kidnapped by one of their own. Now Sargon and the others must enter the enormous fortress on Mount Qaf in order to rescue the Prince and prevent his royal blood from being used to obtain the blessing of Persia's patron deity. However, Qaf has been under a strange curse all this time and Sargon must survive its traps and tricks to learn the truth behind all these events.

All in all, it's an entertaining tale with Sargon as an excellent lead. The Lost Crown frequently takes the time to show how the events affect him and how he finds the will to push on. This is a far larger cast than most Search Actions, which serves to give the game a different feeling than the typical loneliness associated with the genre. It's more about the shifting trust between the group due to the curse of the mountain, and there are many people beyond the Immortals who Sargon meets who all deal with it in different ways. The game also builds up its own mythology with frequent journals detailing the history of the mountain, King Darius and Persia itself. They're not necessary to read, but they do enhance the story of the game for those who care.

The true star of The Lost Crown, though, is the gameplay itself. Sargon is impressively agile, wielding twin swords with ease while keeping combat relatively simple. He has a three-hit combo that can be built upon by launching enemies into the air, continuing the attack, and then smacking them away. All the while, he can defensively dash or slide away from danger or even attempt to pull off a well-timed block which knocks enemies back and leaves them open for counterattack. But these are just the basics, as enemy attacks can sometimes be emphasized in either yellow or red, with the former leading to a spectacular animation that often kills instantly and the latter being completely unblockable. It's a combat

system often done before, but where it truly shines is in how it expands upon these basics.

As is the case with all Search Action games, Sargon will eventually find upgrades that allow him to explore previously unreachable areas. These include an air dash, a double jump and a chakram, as well as the ability to place a shadow that you can return to later, among others. It makes for some fantastic platforming, especially in terms of the occasional dedicated challenges to reach a collectable: They're challenging, but they never feel impossible. It's all about finding a way to make your abilities work together. And they extend to combat as well: Suddenly it's possible to charge up a wave attack, create a shadow, unleash the first and then immediately the second. Or Sargon can extend his air combo by interrupting it with an arrow that essentially allows him to restart from the beginning and really lay on the damage.

I was able to take advantage of a few of these techniques, but seeing those who truly master it will be something else. And it's worth trying to figure them out, because the game is no cakewalk. Enemies hit surprisingly hard and the different varieties often change their attack patterns, leading to a lot of on-the-fly decisions. Sometimes I could handle all of them at once; other times I was not so lucky. Fortunately, defeating them does drop a currency that allows Sargon to not only buy more potions that are refilled at each save station but upgrade his weapons and accessories as well.

And these accessories, which can be bought or found around the map, can change up the gameplay quite a bit. Some are more utilitarian in how they extend your life, how hard you hit or how much currency you earn, while others add extra moves or even change the properties of those moves. It allows each playthrough to feel different and every player to have their own style. The same could be said of the special attacks known as Athra Surges. There are three levels in terms of power, and the Athra meter is charged a little by attacking but majorly with proper counters. Sargon can then unleash these for massive damage or other effects. Only two can be equipped at a time, so once again it comes down to player preference.

It all comes together in a package that doesn't quite match the smoothness of Metroid Dread but is satisfying in its own right. And bosses, especially further on, become a downright spectacle, emphasizing the strength and power of these characters in ways that are so much more dynamic than the 2D viewpoint usually allows. The fights themselves put you constantly on the move and only get better over time.

But The Lost Crown isn't without fault. Mount Qaf is *huge*, with 100% completion taking me 30 hours. That is a lot for a Search Action game, and while the areas are varied and distinct with their setpieces, there weren't enough movement upgrades to support that much content. Traversal was fun, but it took some time to change it up, leading to some moments feeling bogged down.

The game was also glitchy at times on the Switch, as Sargon would clip into the geometry and snap suddenly to either just below or above the platform I was aiming for, leading to unintended damage.

These are all minor complaints, though. The Lost Crown is an excellent entry in the Search Action genre and offers up just enough new ideas to help it stand out. The stylized graphics work wonderfully, especially during the high-action boss fights without the faintest hint of slowdown, and the music maintains a Persian flair that didn't stand out to me but also never grew old. It fit the mood and faded into the background. But you shouldn't let that happen to Prince of Persia! It's a fantastic new direction for the franchise, and an excellent foundation I can only hope the developers build on in the future.

**– DERRICK**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTPELLIER RATING: T

**9.0**

## SECOND OPINION
# SUPER MARIO BROS. WONDER

**NEW 2D MARIO** games used to be a big deal. Not just because they would sell a bajillion copies, but because they were often the pinnacle of creativity and game design. They elicited a feeling of awe that few other games could match! Then New Super Mario Bros. happened and the series completely lost its edge.

Super Mario Bros. Wonder is a breath of fresh air. It doesn't rely on the same sterile assets that have been polished to a spit-shine since the Nintendo DS days. Instead, it ushers in the return of everything that 2D Mario has been missing since the Super NES: personality, weirdness and, as the name suggests, wonder.

The first thing that's immediately apparent is how animated everything looks. Characters bend and bounce in a much more exaggerated way than ever before, and this extends far beyond just the protagonists. Goombas will get scared when they're about to be stomped, while Koopa Troopas put on a brave face when rushing to attack. Everything is wonderfully alive, which adds more to the experience than you might expect.

When it comes to playable characters, Mario, Luigi and Peach are all ready to go, and less common players like Toadette and Daisy fill out the roster nicely. Nabbit and a variety of multicolored Yoshis are also available as a sort of "easy mode." They don't take enemy damage, and the Yoshis have their signature flutter jump and enemy-eating tongue, but they also can't use power-ups, so there's an incentive to use other characters once you feel your skills are up to snuff. The only drawback here is that the Yoshis and Nabbit are the only ones who play differently. Everyone else controls exactly the same, which means no long Luigi jumps, no superior Toad speed and no hovering Princesses.

This shortcoming is easy to overlook though, thanks to Wonder's badge system. As you play, you can earn badges that grant you new abilities, from altering the way you jump to giving you a giant hat that allows you to float. This lets you tailor your gaming experience to your liking with any hero you choose.

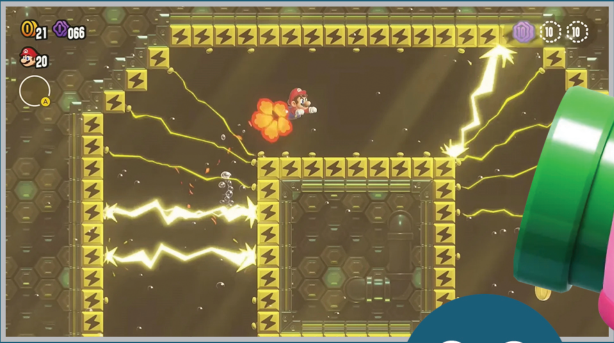
As far as the plot goes, it's about as in-depth as it needs to be: Bowser has taken control of the Flower Kingdom's Wonder Seeds, which amplify his already significant magical prowess. He turns himself into a floating castle for some reason, and begins building up his power to create his ultimate Wonder. It's up to Mario and co. to track down the Seeds and put a stop to Bowser's evil plans!

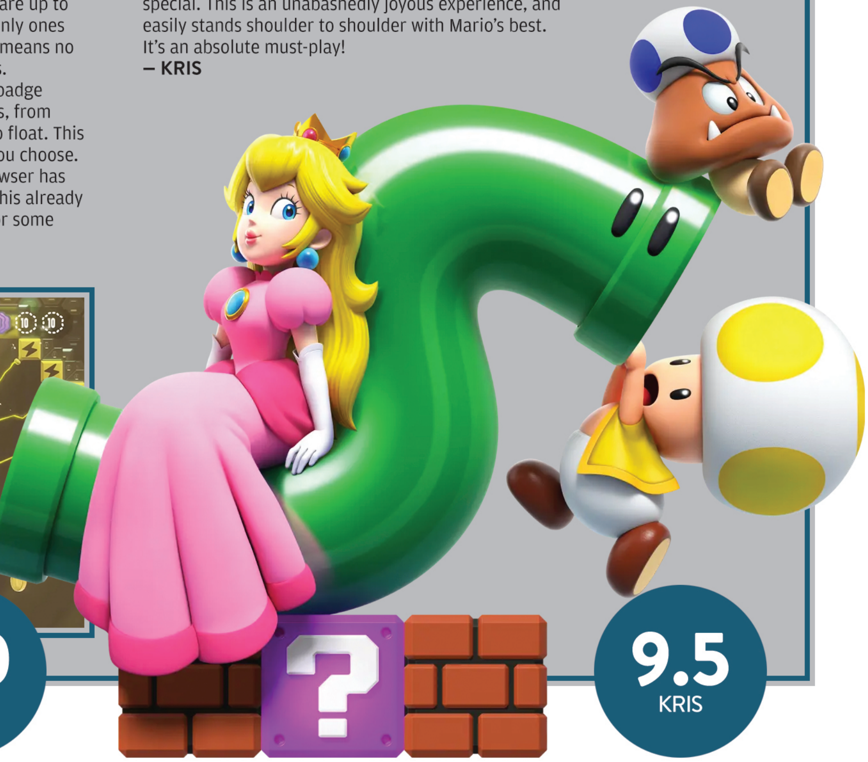
You'll do this by traveling to various themed worlds, but unlike the "New" series, you aren't just hopping between the same desert, grass and snow locales you've seen dozens of times before. Wonder's Flower Kingdom is brimming with creative new areas that come complete with their own original enemies, challenges and "Wonder Effects," special events that, for lack of a better description, make the game go nuts. These range from the subtly amusing to the flat-out mind-bending, some of which were so goofy I literally laughed out loud.

It's a surprisingly musical experience too. Rhythmic elements appear everywhere, including the final boss battle. In fact, one of the most memorable moments of the game comes early on in a stage called Piranha Plants on Parade. I couldn't stop smiling, and that grin rarely left my face for the rest of the game.

No, Super Mario Bros. Wonder doesn't get everything right. The map could have been more clever, some unlockable heroes would have been nice and I'll agree with Lucas' review that the multiplayer could be better. Also, that final secret level is so infuriatingly difficult that it will likely make you want to hurl your controller into the sun! But every single other facet is the perfect embodiment of what makes Nintendo games so special. This is an unabashedly joyous experience, and easily stands shoulder to shoulder with Mario's best. It's an absolute must-play!

**– KRIS**





**9.0** LUCAS

**9.5** KRIS

# ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

## SWITCH

| TITLE | SCORE | REVIEWER | ISSUE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ace Angler: Fishing Spirits | 6.5 | Rebecca | #63 |
| Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp | 9.5 | Lucas | #65 |
| AEW: Fight Forever | 7.0 | David | #67 |
| AI: The Somnium Files – nirvanA Initiative | 8.0 | Tony | #62 |
| Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration | 9.5 | Kris | #64 |
| Atelier Ryza 3: Alchemist of the End & The Secret Key | 9.0 | Thor | #67 |
| Atelier Sophie 2: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Dream | 8.0 | Maggie | #59 |
| Baten Kaitos I & II HD Remaster | 8.0 | Lucas | #68 |
| Bayonetta 3 | 9.0 | Jonathan | #63 |
| Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon | 8.0 | Jonathan | #65 |
| Big Brain Academy: Brain vs. Brain | 8.0 | Kris | #58 |
| Bugsnax | 8.5 | Lucas | #61 |
| Capcom Fighting Collection | 9.0 | Jonathan | #61 |
| ConnecTank | 7.5 | Lucas | #67 |
| Detective Pikachu Returns | 6.0 | Lucas | #68 |
| Digimon Survive | 8.0 | Maggie | #63 |
| Disney Illusion Island | 6.5 | J.-Charles | #68 |
| DNF Duel | 8.0 | Sean | #66 |
| Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons | 8.0 | Kris | #67 |
| Dragon Quest Treasures | 8.0 | Matthew T. | #64 |
| Everybody 1-2-Switch! | 7.5 | Kris | #67 |
| Fashion Dreamer | 7.0 | Rebecca | #69 |
| Fire Emblem Engage | 8.5 | Rebecca | #64 |
| Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes | 8.0 | Rebecca | #61 |
| Harvestella | 8.0 | Nadia | #63 |
| Infinity Strash: Dragon Quest - The Adventure of Dai | 5.0 | Lucas | #68 |
| JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All-Star Battle R | 6.5 | Tony | #62 |
| Kirby and the Forgotten Land | 10 | Lucas | #59 |
| Kirby's Return to Dream Land Deluxe | 9.0 | Lucas | #65 |
| LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga | 9.0 | Thor | #59 |
| LIVE A LIVE | 8.5 | Rebecca | #61 |
| Loop8: Summer of Gods | 6.0 | Maggie | #66 |
| Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope | 9.0 | Lucas | #63 |
| Mario Strikers: Battle League | 7.5 | Lucas | #60 |
| Master Detective Archives: Rain Code | 7.0 | Matthew T. | #67 |
| Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection | 8.0 | David | #65 |
| Metroid Prime Remastered | 10 | Lucas | #64 |
| MLB The Show 22 | 8.5 | Dan | #59 |
| Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl 2 | 5.5 | David | #69 |
| Nickelodeon Kart Racers 3: Slime Speedway | 8.0 | David | #63 |
| Nintendo Switch Sports | 7.5 | Lucas | #59 |
| Octopath Traveler II | 8.5 | Rebecca | #65 |
| Pac-Man Museum+ | 8.5 | Kris | #60 |
| Pac-Man World Re-Pac | 7.5 | Lucas | #62 |
| Pikmin 4 | 10 | Lucas | #67 |
| Pocky & Rocky Reshrined | 8.5 | Lucas | #69 |
| Pokémon Legends: Arceus | 9.0 | Lucas | #58 |
| Pokémon Scarlet | 8.5 | Lucas | #63 |
| Pokémon Violet | 8.5 | Lucas | #63 |
| Puzzle Bobble Everybubble! | 8.0 | Jonathan | #67 |
| Rain on Your Parade | 8.0 | Lucas | #65 |
| Record of Lodoss War: Deedlit in Wonder Labyrinth | 8.0 | Jonathan | #60 |
| Rune Factory 3 Special | 7.5 | Rebecca | #68 |
| Rune Factory 5 | 7.5 | Maggie | #59 |
| Samba de Amigo: Party Central | 7.0 | J.-Charles | #69 |
| Sea of Stars | 9.5 | Kris | #68 |
| Shiren the Wanderer: The Tower of Fortune and the Dice of Fate | 8.5 | Lucas | #69 |
| Silent Hope | 8.0 | Brett | #69 |
| Sonic Colors: Ultimate | 5.0 | Kris | #58 |
| Sonic Frontiers | 7.0 | Tony | #64 |
| Sonic Origins Plus | 8.0 | Tony | #67 |
| Sonic Superstars | 8.5 | Lucas | #69 |
| Splatoon 3 | 9.0 | Lucas | #62 |
| Star Ocean: The Second Story R | 7.0 | Maggie | #69 |
| Story of Seasons: A Wonderful Life | 7.0 | Rebecca | #67 |
| Super Mario Bros. Wonder | 9.0 | Lucas | #69 |
| Super Mario RPG | 9.5 | Lucas | #69 |
| Taiko no Tatsujin: Rhythm Festival | 8.0 | J.-Charles | #63 |
| Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge | 10 | Lucas | #60 |
| Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection | 9.0 | David | #62 |
| The Caligula Effect 2 | 8.0 | Maggie | #58 |
| The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero | 9.0 | Maggie | #62 |
| The Legend of Heroes: Trails into Reverie | 10 | Maggie | #67 |
| The Legend of Heroes: Trails to Azure | 10 | Maggie | #65 |
| The Legend of Nayuta: Boundless Trails | 8.0 | Maggie | #68 |
| The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom | 10 | Lucas | #66 |
| Theatrhythm Final Bar Line | 9.0 | J.-Charles | #65 |
| Triangle Strategy | 9.0 | Nadia | #59 |
| WarioWare: Move It! | 8.0 | Rebecca | #69 |
| We Love Katamari REROLL + Royal Reverie | 9.5 | Jonathan | #66 |
| Wunderling DX | 8.0 | Lucas | #64 |
| Xenoblade Chronicles 3 | 10 | Maggie | #62 |

## SECOND OPINION
## SUPER MARIO RPG

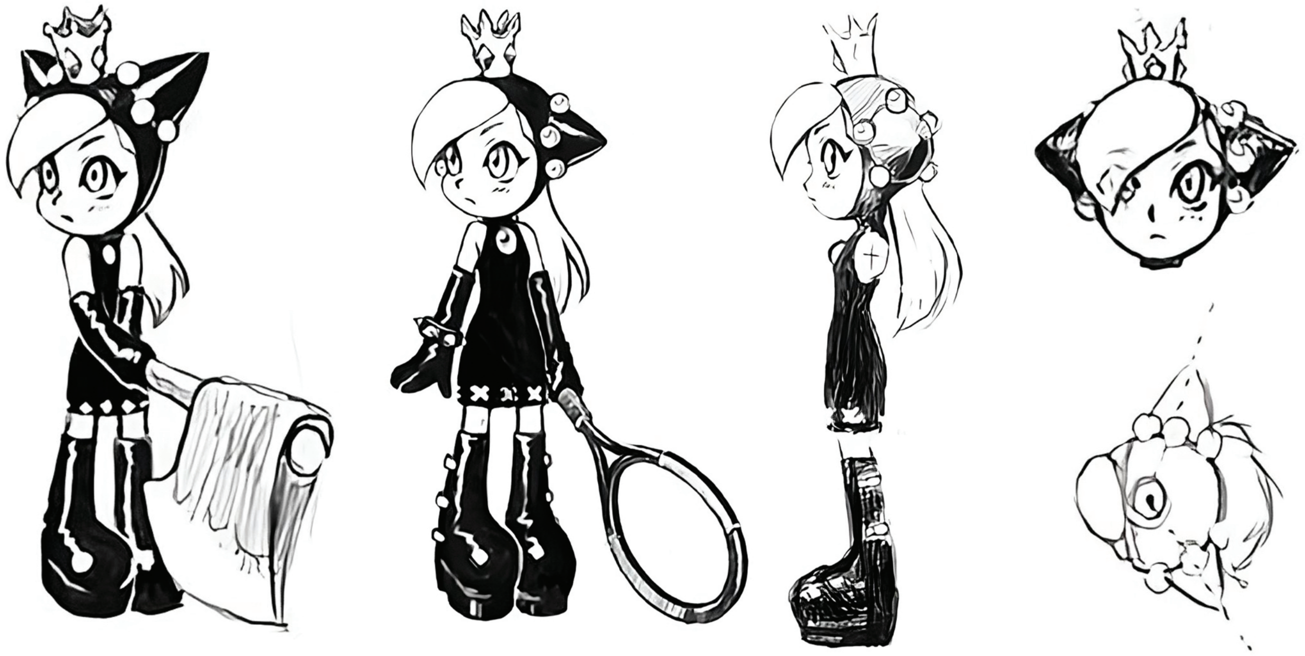
**THE SNES ORIGINAL** Super Mario RPG hit me right in my formative years, and was a huge surprise to see previewed in the halcyon days of Nintendo Power. I had just come off playing Final Fantasy III (now known as VI) and it blew me away to see such high production values in a video game. Now Squaresoft would turn its attention to my favorite franchise, and Bowser wasn't the big bad?! I couldn't wait to get it home! Once I did, I devoured it. I even ended up buying the official soundtrack for it from an import shop where I printed off their catalog on a dot matrix printer! Yeah, I'm old.

To see such dedication and love paid to the game is amazing. Just like Lucas' sons, my family has been enjoying it for the first time as well. It's a great first foray into the RPG genre, and though Nintendo has made it even easier as Lucas discussed, it doesn't diminish its spot among the great RPGs of that time – or this time! Being able to swap in characters is something I wished for during my SNES playthrough, and it is such a great addition, along with the Triple Moves! The added cutscenes are so much fun, and they make the story better and funnier.

Meeting "Claymorton" instead of "Mack the Knife" surprised me, but I always hated the Frog Sage's original name (though that new name is as generic as it gets). The developers kept the style of the original, which is truly surprising given all of the Disney-level character parameters Nintendo seems obsessed with – though less so as of late. It's also fun to see all of the details that the blocky graphics hid, like Booster's reception desk and toy box.

The real story for me is the updated soundtrack. Hearing those bangers with added flourishes and better sound has been amazing.

I feel a lower price tag does seem warranted. The entire game can be consumed in around 12-15 hours, so asking for the AAA $60 is surprising, but then again the Link's Awakening remake hasn't come down in price either. **– BRETT**



FAN ARTISTS HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE

# Wapeach Revealed!

## Concept art confirms the character was considered. And social media has responded!

**FANS HAVE LONG** speculated about what a "warui" (Japanese for "bad") version of Peach might look like, because speculating's all they could do! Outside of fan creations like Bowsette and one-off deviations like Shadow Queen in Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door, Nintendo has consistently shied away from toying with any kind of edgy reimagining of our pretty pink princess.

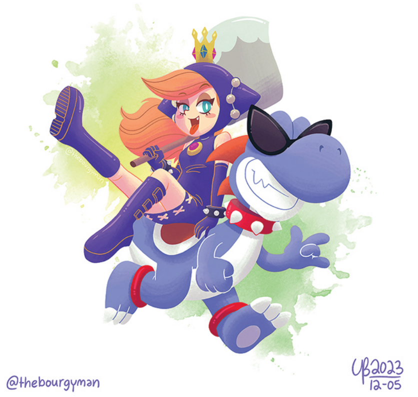
This Wa-shaped hole in Mario's pantheon has long fueled the intense imaginations of artists around the world. Some have even guessed that the brassy, sassy, yellow-clad Daisy (whose name starts with a "d", which when rotated 180 degrees becomes a "P") was actually Wapeach all along! Wouldn't that be a fine kick in the pants?

Well, now we know for sure who Wapeach really is, and maybe still could be! Fumehide Aoki, Nintendo character designer and creator of Waluigi, recently revealed some sketches and models for the real Wapeach, who was once planned to appear in the GameCube's Mario Power Tennis back in 2004. That's right, this "rotten Peach" design has been sitting around unseen for the past 20 years! Aoki tweeted that his intent was to give her "a scary personality when she gets angry" and that she "would treat Wario and Waluigi like her minions."

It was also reported that Shigeru Miyamoto shot down the idea of a Wapeach because she'd be too similar to Doronjo, the dominating debutante of the Yatterman series, last seen on a Nintendo console this side of the pond in Tatsunoko vs. Capcom on the Wii. And Miyamoto-san has a point. Doronjo even has two lackies who bear a striking resemblance to Nintendo's notorious Wa-talian antiheroes! Comparisons were inevitable, at least in Japan.

But being shelved hasn't stopped Wapeach from growing on the Mario community. Personally, I hope she still makes her way to a game someday. Maybe she's secretly Grape, the main villain of Princess Peach: Showtime!? (We'll find out if that far-out theory bears fruit soon.)

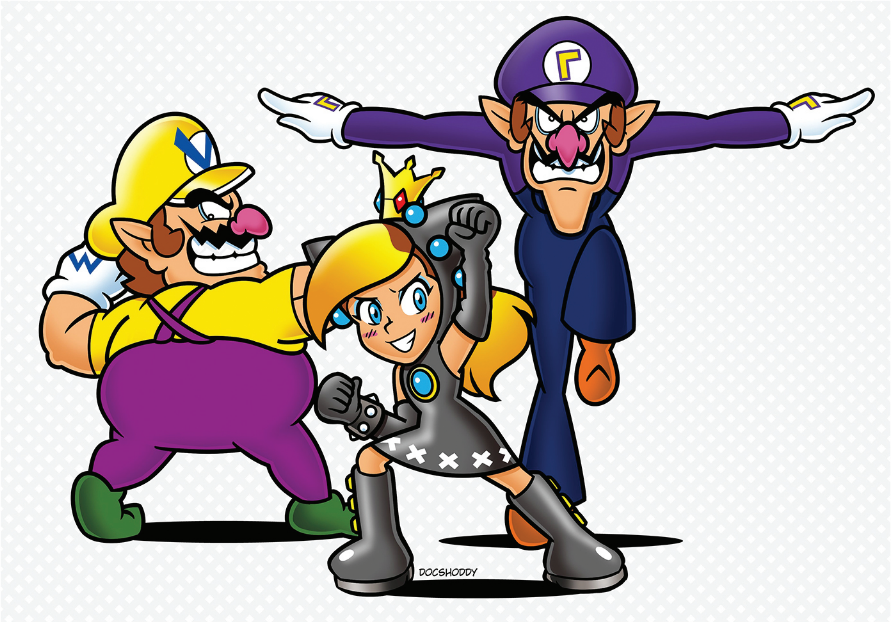
In the meantime, check out the adjacent gallery of amazing fan art that sprouted after the diminutive, axe-wielding Wa-woman's reveal a few months ago! She may not have made the cut in '04, but she looks ready to chop everyone she sees here in '24! **— JONATHAN**




- @THEBOURGYMAN

- @ACTIONHANKBEARD

- @ELCAJARITO

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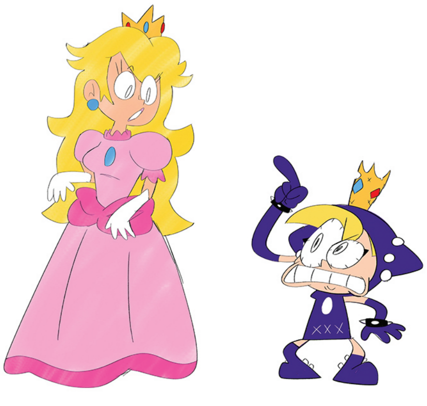


- @NOTJOSHART

- @JSKETCH12

SPEEDRUNNING FOR CHARITY

# ATTENDING AGDQ

## An in-person report straight from the frozen streets of Pittsburgh!

**HAVE YOU EVER** watched a Games Done Quick event? Have you ever looked at all the people there, in the crowd, cheering on the speedrunners as they run with speed? Have you ever thought to yourself, "Huh. That could be me!"? Well, me too!

I've been a fan of GDQ for over a decade now, but I've always been a fan from afar. Until this past January! For Awesome Games Done Quick 2024 in Pittsburgh, I finally made the trip and attended in person. Along with my 12-year-old son, Carter!

Carter turning 12 last fall is what prompted us to put in the in-person effort, since that's traditionally been the youngest age allowed for live attendance at GDQ events. So we've actually been awaiting AGDQ 2024 specifically for many years!

Driving through several states' worth of snow, we arrived in frigid Pennsylvania and were immediately warmly welcomed. LLK, whom you all know as the artist of our on-going REST-O comic series, is also the resident artist for the GDQ events and was there to greet us in person. So we got our own personal tour guide!

Carter and I got to (carefully) walk through the behind-the-scenes, where-the-magic-happens area at the edge of the auditorium, where hundreds of wires snake their way

betweens PCs, TVs, cameras, lights and microphones. Every video game console ever released was present – many of them with dozens of units on hand – and hundreds of controllers, too, so that the GDQ tech team can get pretty much any game ever made up and running, with its audio and video simultaneously broadcast to Twitch for the at-home audience to enjoy. I was amazed at the complexity of it all!

In fact, AGDQ 2024's tech setup was more complicated than ever, as the team had created two side-by-side runner positions on the stage. In the past, when one speedrunner completed their turn, the broadcast would have to take a fairly lengthy break in order to get them up out of the hot seat, swap in the next game and system, sit the next runner down and get them ready to go. With the new split-stage arrangement, the tech crew could be working to get the next game up and running on one half of the stage even while the current run was still happening just a few feet away from them! The result was far fewer delays as the week went on – in fact, there may have been none at all, as they ended up adding in a few extra runs with all the setup time they'd saved!

It was a smooth experience all around, and a more laid-back affair as an attendee than I expected. You can come and go from the main broadcast room as you please (so long as you're not being deliberately disruptive or anything like that), and you're even welcome to sit up fairly close behind the runners and see yourself clearly in the background on the livestream! Carter and I took full advantage of that opportunity, and if you go back and watch the recorded runs on GDQ's YouTube channel, you can see the two of us hamming it up on or near the "back couch" for runs like Pikmin 4 by Kap, Mega Man 3 by KLM1187 and Donkey Kong Country by Tonkotsu.

Not to mention Gyromite, the speedrun that was perfomed by Peanut Butter the dog! We sat on the back couch for that one too, though not visibly on camera, since that run was done remotely. Peanut Butter wasn't there in person, sadly! But we still supported that good doggo by sitting an actual jar of peanut butter on the couch as he played.

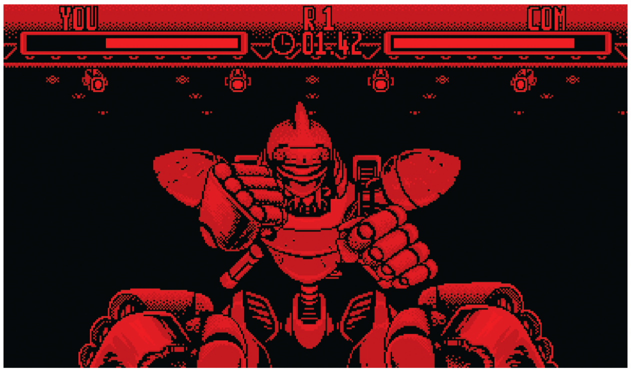
Though we missed out on shaking Peanut Butter's paw, we did meet more new friends in person for the first time, including NF's own John-Charles Holmes (who was there to represent The Yetee), dwangoAC and TASBot (pictured above), and gregarious prize host Mr. Game and Shout. Who presented one familiar prize!

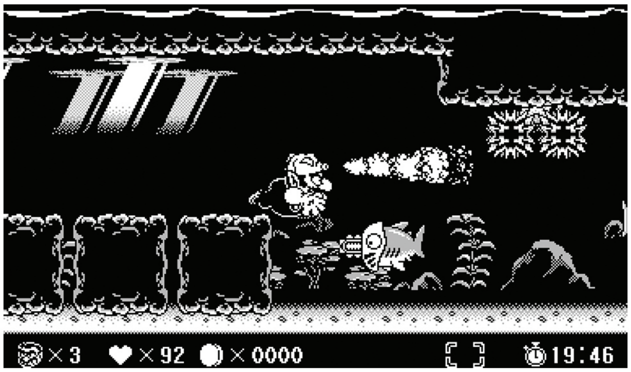
Yes, I was able to complete a personal mission of mine: donating a book I'd written to be a prize at a GDQ event! I brought several copies of The Impact of Iwata along for the trip, and the prize team was able to offer them as motivation to encourage more donations to The Prevent Cancer Foundation. Since Mr. Iwata passed away from cancer himself, I feel like he absolutely would have supported that charity's efforts.

My favorite moment of the event came in the practice room. Carter, who's usually extremely introverted in person, approached two runners who were working on Super Mario 64 skips and introduced himself. Immediately they took him under their wing, passed him the controller and patiently taught him how to perform "Cannonless." (Look it up!) He worked at it for nearly an hour, trying it over and over again, as his new mentors cheered him on and never lost faith. And then . . . he got it! He pulled it off, and the four of us all shouted and turned every head in the room. I snapped the photo above as quickly as I could, to capture the absolute glee on my son's face. It was a beautiful moment, and a memory I'll hold dear forever. My thanks to GDQ for making it possible!

Maybe I'll see you all at Summer Games Done Quick? **— LUCAS**

YouTube.com/GamesDoneQuick




INNOVATION IN EMULATION

# Virtual Boy Revived on 3DS

## A new fan-made emulator called Red Viper has finally done what Nintendo refused to do themselves.

**IT WOULD'VE BEEN** so perfect!

Nintendo pioneered home 3D gaming in the '90s with the Virtual Boy. It flopped. Then they brought the idea back with the 3DS in 2011, and it succeeded! But during all the years of success the 3DS enjoyed in the market, Nintendo never once took the obvious opportunity to revisit their Virtual Boy games and re-release them. It would've been perfect! The stereoscopic 3DS screen could've actually accurately presented those legacy titles the way they were meant to be seen!

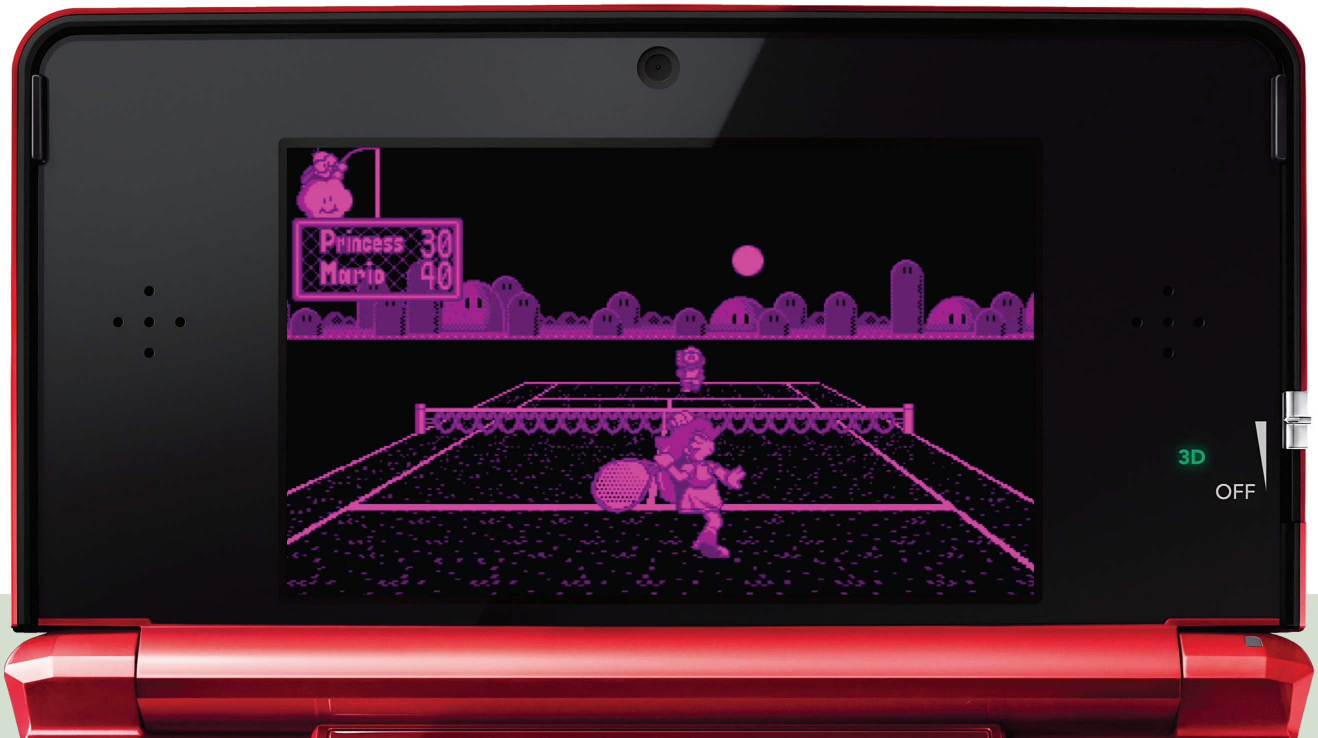
Nintendo never did it. But now, picking up the slack, a fan finally has.

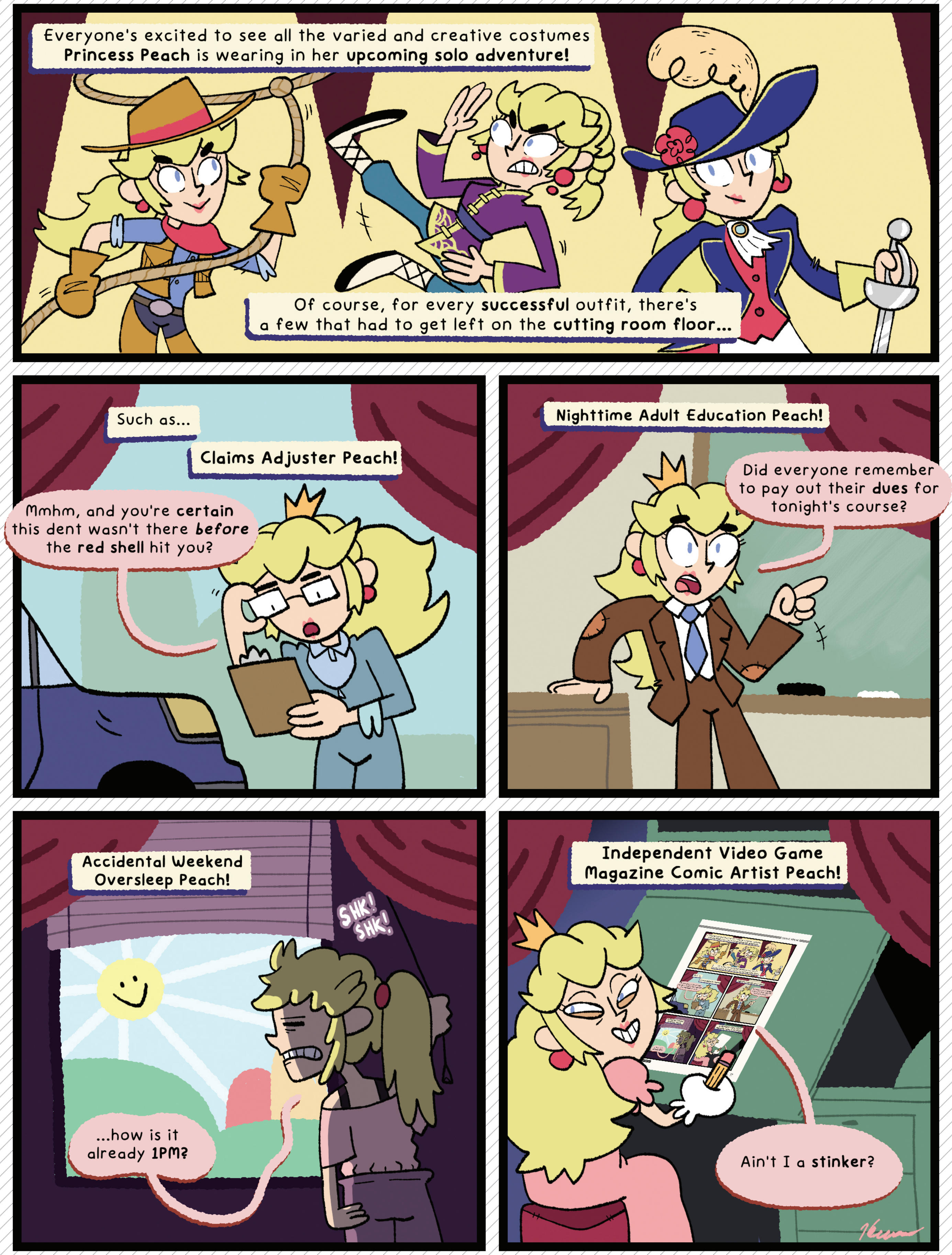
A hobbyist developer named Floogle has launched "Red Viper," a new Virtual Boy emulator for the 3DS family of systems. It runs every officially released VB game (there weren't very many of them) at full speed, and, critically, their 3D depth is perfectly preserved! Crank that 3D slider to max and be amazed by eye-popping mid-'90s 3D visuals without the need to cram your face into a pair of table-locked red plastic goggles.

Red Viper also allows users to choose display colors other than red, as an in-emulator color wheel lets you select your preferred view. Make the games blue! Or green! Dial down the color entirely so they all look like souped-up monochrome Game Boy titles! Your eyes will thank you for sparing them the ultrascarlet blaze.

All of this is entirely unofficial, of course, and you'll need a homebrew-modded 3DS system to be able to run Red Viper. But that's not too hard to make happen . . . and besides, you aren't using your 3DS for anything else right now. So jump through the few needed hoops and explore the Virtual Boy library! **— LUCAS**

GitHub.com/skyfloogle/red-viper






BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

# NEXT ISSUE

The early months of 2024 have been packed with more fresh Switch content than we predicted! We've got some new releases that have dropped just before (or mere days after) the printing deadline for the issue you're reading right now, so we'll round up reviews for adventures like **Splatoon 3's Side Order, Contra: Operation Galuga** and **Ufouria: The Saga 2** in NF #71.

Of course, we'll also put the final version of **Princess Peach: Showtime!** through its paces. After we're done diving into that one, though, we'll have some other deep dives to do . . . into aquatic adventures like **Another Crab's Treasure** and the just-revealed **Endless Ocean: Luminous!** You won't want to miss swimming in the seven seas in our 71st edition. So get your floaties on and get ready!

## IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #71:

**ENDLESS OCEAN:** LUMINOUS

ANOTHER CRAB'S **TREASURE**

**SPLATOON 3:** SIDE ORDER

**CONTRA:** OPERATION GALUGA

PRINCESS PEACH: **SHOWTIME!**

**PAPER MARIO:** THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

LUIGI'S MANSION **2 HD**

**UFOURIA: THE SAGA 2**

DRAGON QUEST MONSTERS: THE DARK PRINCE

**PERSONA 5 TACTICA**

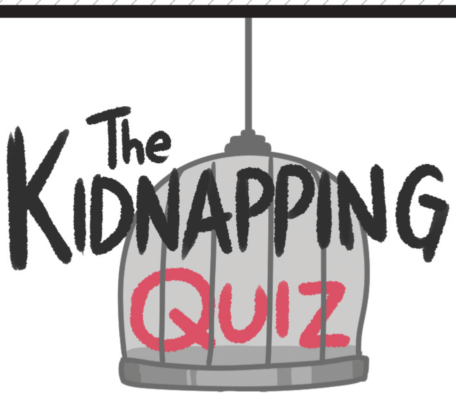
**TACTICS OGRE:** REBORN

**RETRO GAME CHALLENGE:** 1+2 REPLAY

OTOGI KATSUGEKI **MAMEDA NO BAKERU:** ORACLE SAITAROU NO SAINAN!!

AND MUCH **MORE!**

**MAY/ JUNE 2024**



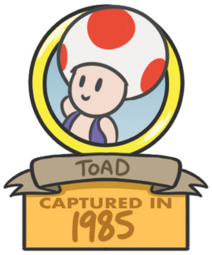

# ANSWER KEY!

**DON'T LOOK YET!** Not until you've done your best to name them all for yourself first, of course. I'll give you another minute . . . good? OK, now you're free to consult this answer key. Many of these characters have been captured/kidnapped/shanghaied multiple times over the years, but these years and games represent the first time each of them got nabbed. Fact check us if you like! Maybe we got one wrong somewhere! **— LUCAS**

DONKEY KONG

DONKEY KONG JR.

SUPER MARIO BROS.




SUPER MARIO BROS.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

SUPER MARIO LAND

SUPER MARIO WORLD

MARIO IS MISSING!

YOSHI'S ISLAND

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

SUPER MARIO 64 DS

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

DKC: TROPICAL FREEZE

CAPTAIN TOAD: TREASURE TRACKER

CAPTAIN TOAD: TREASURE TRACKER

MARIO + RABBIDS: SPARKS OF HOPE

SUPER MARIO BROS. WONDER

WAHAHAHAHAHAH HAHAHAHAH!!!!!

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